

Interview with Bobbi Hovis (1925-2024), first Navy nurse to volunteer for Vietnam duty. Korea, Vietnam.

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Interviewer: Jan Herman

Herman: Interview with Lieutenant Commander Bobbi Hovis, Nurse Corps, USN, (Ret.) December 2nd, 1994, at Annapolis, Maryland, interviewed by Jan Herman, Historian, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery.

I know you've mentioned all this in your book and so I don't want to belabor it, but I just want to know, you grew up in Pennsylvania.

Hovis: Yes.

Herman: When did you decide you wanted to be a Navy nurse or a nurse, not a Navy nurse, but a nurse? Obviously, nursing was something you were interested in from the beginning.

Hovis: Oh, I should say. Five years old, and I focused on that from age five. Everything was geared to becoming a nurse. Then when World War II started, I was sixteen years old and I said, "I have to be a Navy nurse. I have to be a Navy flight nurse."

Herman: Why Navy?

Hovis: I can't really say, except that I was always so water oriented. I grew up on the water, in it, on it, under it. All of my relatives were Navy in World War II, my uncles. My dad was too young for World War I and too old for World War II, so my dad wasn't in, but my uncles and cousins, most every one of them were in the Navy, so I suppose that's the reason. But it just had to be Navy all the way, and I never lost my focus to become those things and I did. Somebody said to me, "Well, how can you know that at age five and stay so focused?" A good friend of mine said, "Do you know why?"

I said, "Well, no."

She said, "Because you grew up an only child and you did not have the distractions of siblings."

You know, academically I was highly focused and always did well in school, and I didn't have the distractions I might have had otherwise. So I think there might be a point to it, in looking back on my life. I would come home from school, I would get that homework done and get my papers done, and then I would go out to play. I did that on my own, my parents never had to drag me to the books, because I just knew I had to do that, because I had to do that for what I wanted to do with my life.

Herman: So how did you prepare to be a nurse? What was your training like? Where did you train?

Hovis: Well, I trained at one of the very best schools of nursing in Pennsylvania. I had to set my high school academic goals very high to even be accepted, and I did focus, again, on getting very high grades in school to be accepted at the Western Pennsylvania Hospital School of

Nursing in Pittsburgh. I was accepted and I did go to school there, and I graduated with honors. Then it was all Navy from there.

Herman: So once you graduated, what year was that?

Hovis: 1946, and I had to wait until I was twenty-one. I was not twenty-one, so I had to wait 'til I was twenty-one to come into the Navy. So then I went home to northern Pennsylvania and I worked four or five months, I forget exactly now, in a civilian hospital in the town in which my dad worked. He was a Westinghouse man, so I would ride to work with him. I just built on some experience in nursing and emergency room nursing, that type of thing. So then when I did go in active duty, I probably was a little jump ahead with some degree of experience right out of nursing school.

Herman: What was joining the Navy like? What was the procedure for it?

Hovis: The recruiting office was in Pittsburgh and I had to go to Pittsburgh to the recruiting office and meet the recruiters, and they gave me the necessary paperwork. Then you had to go through an FBI check, background check, BI, they call it, background investigation. Actually, agents came out to my hometown and they interviewed schoolteachers and businesspeople. I think they did five different interviews in those days so see that you were a stalwart character, I guess.

So the necessary paperwork had to be completed, and then you had to pass a very strict physical exam, which I did. Then you submitted all the papers and you waited for them to be processed, then you either got a yea or a nay, and I got my yea and went back to Pittsburgh for swearing-in and became a ensign.

Then my first duty station was Jacksonville Naval Air Station, the hospital there. What we went through, brand-new Navy nurses went through in those days was called indoctrination. They had four or five indoctrination centers located at the bigger naval hospitals, Jacksonville and Philadelphia and San Diego and Great Lakes, hospitals of that size.

So I went on active duty in October and got my first set of orders in July. So I was from October to July at Jacksonville in indoctrination. I guess they call it orientation now. Then my first set of orders took me to Key West, Florida.

In all of my duty stations, I never had a bad duty station. You make duty stations--you make the best of them, you take advantage of the opportunities that are there, and there are all kinds of opportunities at every station, even out on the Aleutian Island chain, the Island of Adak. So I really had a marvelous career. Of course, my flying aspect was--

Herman: Tell me how you got involved. You were at Key West as your first duty station. You were there for, what, three years?

Hovis: To August of 1950. So that would be '48 to '50, yes, a little over two years.

Herman: What was your specialty at that point?

Hovis: Well, I was, of course, a brand-new ensign, so you always were low man on the totem pole, so you spent much of your time on p.m.'s and night duty, but just general ward nursing.

You rotated from surgery to medicine, orthopedics, but I always preferred surgery and orthopedics and OR, as opposed to, say, internal medicine. I always leaned toward the surgical aspects. General ward nurse is what I was in those early days.

Herman: This would have been when in 1950, the early part of the year that you left? Had the war broken out yet? It wasn't June yet of '50?

Hovis: June 25th of 1950, I was on night duty, and in my course of rounds, ward rounds at night, I went by the O.D.'s office. Radio broadcasting was interrupted and they said that North Korea had invaded South Korea and that we were now at war. But I had submitted my request for Navy flight school sometime in '48 or '49 and, of course, that had been submitted to the Bureau and it was being processed. So I did then get orders to flight school in August of '50, had a little leave, and then did report to Gunter [phonetic] Air Force Base, which is a satellite field of Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama.

We had a nine-week, supposedly it was a nine weeks' very intense flight nursing curriculum, and then with the war and our having to get out there to the Korean theater, that nine weeks was packed into six weeks.

Herman: Tell me about that. How were you trained there? Even before we get to that, what was it like to be going to an Air Force base as a Navy nurse? Do you remember what that was like?

Hovis: Well, I remember that we lived in a terrible quarters. We had iron cots for beds, and we had one straight-backed chair, and one set of dresser drawers for our clothing and then a rod hanging in the corner of the room to hang your clothes on. The quarters were not nearly as nice as Navy, let me say that. But it wasn't like I was entirely away from the Navy, because this was a combined school. We had Navy nurses, Air Force nurses, and one Royal Canadian Air Force nurse who went through the curriculum with us.

So we had our Air Force friends in the class, too, but of course, the Navy stuck together. We were sort of housed in the same barracks, so it wasn't like I was entirely away from the Navy. Besides, we were just worked to death just trying to get that whole course in in six weeks as opposed to nine. So even if you had any thoughts along those lines, you never had time. You were either studying or flying or you went to bed and got some sleep when you could.

Herman: What was the curriculum like? What was the training like, the course work?

Hovis: Well, our student medi-evac flights we flew in the old C-47s mostly, and we would fly to places like Egland [phonetic] Air Force Base. We flew there for our all-weather training in their climatic hangar. We had cold-weather training, we had jungle training, we had water training and desert training. So we went through those phases of survival in these four different types of environments.

Then we would just go through the regular medi-evac flight protocol, going into a base to pick up patients. We learned how to do that. The paperwork involved was considerable. Go to the hospital, screen your patients, ride back to the aircraft with them. This prevailed throughout, that's what we did throughout after we got out into the fleet and out into the squadrons.

Herman: Air-evacating a patient is quite different from just putting a patient on an ambulance, so there were things you had to know that were particularly unique to flight and aviation. What were some of those things?

Hovis: Well, specifically head injury care and chest, because both are influenced by altitude. Even in those days, though, we were not flying in pressurized aircraft; that was before we had those types of aircraft. But you would attempt not to fly a head injury for at least a month, and a chest injury, too. They tried to not fly them at least for that time interval. So emphasis was placed on those two types of casualties.

We did fly polio patients, and we had to manage those old iron lungs. It was hard because it required thirty-seven volts in the aircraft. Not many aircraft had a thirty-seven-volt power system, so polio flights were very special, and managing of the polio patient at altitude was kind of special, too.

Then you had to be concerned about patients in heavy casts, particularly if we had to ditch the aircraft. Actually, there would probably be very little we could do for patients in heavy spicas, heavy shoulder casts, as far as having those patients survive and getting them off the aircraft into life rafts. So a lot of emphasis was on ditching, survival at sea, managing patients as far as getting them out of the aircraft and into life rafts. We were taught to save ourselves first, because we were the only medical people, and we were taught individual survival techniques as far as surviving in the water. We had to save ourselves so that any surviving patients we could take care of. That's what we were taught.

Herman: These were unpressurized and these were the C-47s that you were still training in?

Hovis: This was still in training. When we got out to the 1453rd Medi-evac Squadron in Hawaii we flew--and this is what was kind of interesting, too, we flew all the old dinosaurs and junkers, C-54s and R-4Ds that were used in the Berlin airlift, and those planes were worn out. They even had coal dust in the cracks in the decks still from all of the coal that was hauled into Berlin after the war. So we were really flying equipment that we shouldn't have been flying, at least in my estimation, those long transits across the Pacific. Fortunately, we were all right. I never completed a mission on four engines, though. If I did, it was so rare I can't even remember it.

Herman: Oh, gee, that's encouraging.

Hovis: Then later the Air Force got the new C-97 Stratocruisers, Boeing Stratocruisers, which was pure luxury, although they had such a high patient capacity compared to what we were used to. The fact that litters were five high, it was very difficult to administer nursing care on that fifth--well, it'd be the top litter. Our huge medical kits were quite large and they weighed about sixty pounds, so we would drag the medical kit along and then stand on that to reach those top-level patients. We always tried to put the least nursing care types of patients at that level, or the tallest ones of us would take care of the patient, or a corpsman, taller, much taller corpsman, would usually get those patients.

Herman: Still in training with the C-47s, these were unpressurized aircraft, so you couldn't go above, what, 10,000 feet?

Hovis: Twelve was max.

Herman: Twelve was maximum?

Hovis: And then you couldn't stay there forever either. That's when, if you were flying for a number of hours, you began symptoms of hypoxia.

Herman: Above 12,000 or at 12,000 even.

Hovis: Uh-huh.

Herman: You had said something the other day when we were driving along, you had said something about flying in Catalinas. Was this before this or was this after?

Hovis: No, this was before I went to flight school. This was in Key West. I got to fly a couple of flights, two or three, three, I think, from Key West, Boca Chica [phonetic] Naval Air Station, to Havana. We would always have patients to bring back to be seen in the States from the embassy, or maybe a Marine from the embassy, somebody that had to come back for medical treatment that they couldn't get there, so I flew a few of those flights.

Herman: What were they like, those Catalina flights?

Hovis: Very, very slow, but I just loved the Catalina flight. I have a thing about flying boats, anyway, so I was just thrilled to death to fly in a Catalina flying boat.

Herman: When you got to Havana, you landed in the Havana Harbor. How did that work?

Hovis: Well, the Catalinas going into Havana, we landed at the air base there, we did not make water landings.

Herman: Oh, that's right.

Hovis: In Key West we did, but in Havana we didn't have to.

Herman: I see. So there were several versions of the PBV and one of them had wheels and--

Hovis: Oh, yeah, all of them had wheels, they were amphibians, true amphibians.

Herman: So you could land on land.

Hovis: Oh, yeah.

Herman: When you were in Havana, did you ever get off and go wander around?

Hovis: Sure. Oh, yeah, we had--in fact, we called them RONS, remain overnight. So we would go down one morning, and you know you're only ninety miles away.

Herman: How long did the flight take?

Hovis: Well, I'm trying to think what the ground speed of the Catalina was. It was probably about 110 miles an hour, so it was about an hour's flight. Then we would go down in the morning and then we could spend a day at the embassy or the naval base. The air base people would give us a Jeep or something, and the air crews would go into Havana and have lunch or have dinner and wander around, and then we would then go back the next morning to Key West.

Herman: After your graduation from the flight school at Gunter, this was at Gunter Air Force Base, what happened next after that?

Hovis: It was very interesting. I had had a very solid background in aviation in high school. It was called the Civilian Defense Corps, and I was a member of that as a high school student. I'd always wanted to fly. Another goal of mine, besides being a nurse, was to fly, and hopefully own my own airplane some day, so I took every course that was offered in high school in the Civilian Defense line. I passed my restricted radio telephone operator's license, I got my license there. I went to a complete ground school, aviation ground school. I had my complete meteorology course as a high school student. But it was during the war, so we had no gasoline to get our pilot's license, but I had my complete ground school.

So having this background, the Air Force chief nurse asked me, prior to graduation, if I would stay on and be on their faculty and teach. Of course, I felt quite honored about that, but I had worked so long and so hard for this flight nurse thing that I wanted to get out to the squadron and get out to the Korean War, that's what I was trained to do. I very graciously declined the offer and told her I'd worked long and hard for this, and that I just really wanted to go out to the squadrons, and she said she understood.

So I immediately then got my orders to the Pacific, what we called the Korean airlift, and the squadron was stationed in Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii. But we were seldom there; we island-hopped across to Japan. We actually followed the same routes as the glorious old Pan-American Clippers from Hickam to Johnson to Midway to Wake Islands, all islands, Iwo Jima, Guam. In fact, I scuba-dived my way across the Pacific, I think, because we were always having engine failures early on. I always carried my scuba gear with me.

Herman: Not for ditching, though? [Laughter]

Hovis: [Laughter] No, not for ditching, but to dive on the reefs of all these islands. Of course, we would dead-head, flight crews would dead-head out to Japan, meaning that we had no patients going out, so we would rest as much as we could, knowing that these were going to be grueling flights, particularly in non-pressurized aircraft, and long flights across the Pacific.

Herman: You had said something, of course, in your book, in the introduction, and you talked about when you had gotten to California, I'm not sure it was at that point, and you heard about the tragedy of the *Benevolence*--no, that's wrong, you had heard about it earlier. But when you flew out, you could look down and see the hulk of the *Benevolence*.

Hovis: Precisely.

Herman: What was that like?

Hovis: Oh, well, that happened in August of 1950, and then, you know, in September, too, we had the C-54--

Herman: The *Kwajalein*.

Hovis: *Kwajalein* crash. So we had a lot of tragedy as far as losing Navy nurses on their way out to the war area. So the leg of my flights back from Hawaii to Travis Air Force Base, we had the continental run occasionally. Making our approach to Travis, oftentimes we'd fly right over San Francisco Bay, and you could see that beautiful ship just lying on her side with the red cross and the green stripe and the white hull. To look down on that, I think there's something so majestic and so beautiful in a hospital ship, anyway, but seeing her down there and then learning that they were never going to salvage her, it was kind of was heartrending to me to look at that magnificent ship. I think ships are so magnificent anyway, and those gleaming white hulls with the red crosses and the green stripes are special to me, and to see it lying there was very distressing.

Herman: So you headed across on your first trip to--what kind of aircraft were you on then?

Hovis: It was a C-54. It was an Air Force C-54, Berlin airlift vintage.

Herman: So one of the broken-down, tired old aircraft?

Hovis: In fact, there was one all flight crews hated to get, and its fuselage number was 5559, we called her "Triple Nickel Nine." She had such an aileron group that the pilots hated to fly her because they could never trim her up and get her in perfect trim. So anytime anybody drew "Triple Nickel Nine," they all just threw up their hands and hoped we made it across and back. But she held up. But they hated to fly that airplane.

Herman: So when you went over, did you go over with fellow Navy nurses or were there also Air Force nurses aboard?

Hovis: Yes, I did. I went over with a gal by the name of Joyce Hoover, who was in my class. You might even know Wallie O'Barto [phonetic], she lives right there in Pooks [phonetic] Hill.

Herman: Does she?

Hovis: Uh-huh. She's a super gal. We went over together. So I did. Those kids out of my class, we went together, some of us did. So it was fun to go with your good friends, and to this day--

Herman: Was she Navy?

Hovis: Wallie, yes.

Herman: There were some Air Force nurses?

Hovis: Oh, yeah, they far outnumbered us.

Herman: Where was your first stop on your way over?

Hovis: Wake Island.

Herman: So you flew from California all the way to Wake?

Hovis: Oh, no, I thought you meant my first mission after I arrived in--

Herman: You went to probably Hickam first.

Hovis: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Then we processed in, that was to be our home base, but as the war evolved, we were barely there. We flew eighty hours a month and that was a lot in prop aircraft, to be at that borderline altitude and--

Herman: Still unpressurized?

Hovis: Yeah. It was very grueling as far as rest, just no rest at all. As it turned out, that year, winter of '50, was the worst year they'd had in years in both Japan and Korea. If you recall, as a historian I'm sure you remember the Chosun Reservoir Battle.

Herman: Chosun Reservoir, yes.

Hovis: That was in December of 1950, and we lost more Marines. Particularly the Marines fought at the Chosun. I guess there was some Army, too, but I seem to only remember Marine patients. But we would fly back just whole planeloads of Marines with nothing but frostbite, because they weren't prepared for such a grueling winter and such a severe battle with the North Koreans. The aircraft cabins had to be kept very cool with frostbite. We'd have whole planeloads of patients without another type of wound at all except frostbite in the hands and feet, so you had to keep the cabin very cool in order to bring those frostbitten patients back in the best possible state and attempt to save those fingers and toes and feet and hands. So we nearly froze.

Flight crews weren't really adequately dressed. That leather flight jacket on top of the green jacket you saw, that's the maximum we had, and to keep those cabins as cool as we did, we would kind of rotate--"we" meaning the medical crews. We'd go up on the flight deck to warm up, we were so freezing cold. We had a high rate of pneumonias and severe colds, URIs, in amongst the flight crew members, particularly those on the frostbite flights.

Herman: Where did you pick the--well, before I ask you the next question, I wanted to go back to the frostbite, while we're still on the subject. You had, let's say, a planeload of these patients, these Marines who had been at Chosun through that campaign. How many patients are you talking about on a flight like that, roughly?

Hovis: Well, let me see, I can't really remember how many we could carry on the 54s. When we got the C-97s, it depended on, you know, we would always have some--the cabin was configured for mostly litters and then maybe a few ambulatories, but early on, as I recall, they were all litter patients. So I want to say right in the neighborhood of a hundred patients on the 97s. I can't remember that specifically. But you know, they had an awful lot of pain and--

Herman: The frostbite.

Hovis: --and early gangrene, so we had to treat their pain and try to keep them as comfortable as we could. Of course, those kids, the Marines, went to Oakland to the Amputation Center at Oakland Naval Hospital in Oakland, California.

Herman: So in order to treat the frostbite, the temperature was essential that you bring the injuries back to temperature slowly, but what other things could you do for them?

Hovis: Not much. If they had weeping dressings, which many of them did, the most we could do for those people were pain control and dressing changes as necessary and just try to keep them comfortable, and then to keep them warm. We just had tons of blankets in trying to keep them warm and having to keep that cabin as cool as we had to do.

Herman: What would have been the temperature of the cabin, in the thirties?

Hovis: No, no. No, not that severe, but probably in the forties, low forties, probably, as I recall. Certainly not over fifty.

Herman: For pain control, what did you use, morphine?

Hovis: Morphine and Demerol, primarily.

Herman: Where did you pick these patients up? What would have been a typical, let's say, a typical mission? Where would it have started before you picked these patients up?

Hovis: When we would dead-head from Hickam, we would fly to Japan, we'd land at Hanita [phonetic] Air Force Base, which was the old Japanese Air Force Base and which we took over during the occupation. That, of course, was a long flight across there and then we would--

Herman: How long?

Hovis: Oh, just hours and hours, because we had fuel stops, we had all these islands, so twenty-four hours, maybe. We would be so dead that we would just go to bed and get some sleep, although we would try to sleep on the way out. We could, all of us, get into or lie down on litters and rest, or do what we wanted on the way out. So I always tried to rest as much as I could, and most of us did that. The corpsmen often would play cards and that sort of thing.

But after that Pacific hop, we would land at Hanita, get some rest, then we'd have to get up, say, the next morning and make that trip from Hanita Air Force Base in Tokyo to Yokosuka Naval Station, some distance away from Tokyo, the Yokosuka shipyard where the naval hospital

was located. Then we would be given a list of air-evac patients, and we would have a chief nurse stationed there in Hanita and she would coordinate with the naval hospital which patients would go on this particular aircraft that just came in.

So then we would go down to Yokosuka and we would what we called screen our patients. That means we visited every patient, went over his entire history, frostbite, gunshot, whatever, with the board medical officer. He would brief us on specific things we should watch for in flight, anything specific that we needed to know, because we were the only medical ones aboard, no doctors were aboard. We would introduce ourselves to the patients, and then maybe that would be like eight to ten in the morning or twelve, and maybe we were scheduled for a 4 p.m. takeoff, so then whenever we finished our briefings, then we would come back to quarters and then wait until time for patient loading.

Then when it was time to load patients, we would go down to the flight line and the strings of ambulances would have come from Yokosuka and we would board the aircraft. We already had--I did, anyway--I guess most people did, they already had planned in their minds which spot in the aircraft that patient would go. Now, the more nursing care, like in the C-97s, I would like them on the second or third tier because that's the easy level to work with, instead of one on the deck, you'd have to break your back leaning over to take care of him. The most critical and the ones that required the most nursing care were kind of placed at a level where it was easier to take care of them.

We'd get them all strapped in and we would brief them, tell them what was going to happen, and the next thing you know, we were taxiing out and cleared for takeoff, and we were off and headed back across the Pacific.

Herman: Making the requisite number of stops for fueling.

Hovis: Fuel flights. See, we would often land--

Herman: The patients at these stops, they were not ever offloaded then, they remained on the aircraft in their litters?

Hovis: No. Guam was a staging area, and oftentimes those patients would be, and these are the worst types, they would be offloaded at Guam, taken to the hospital, anything that needed to be done for them, like severe dressing changes or where there was a lot of bleeding into a cast, maybe a cast might require changing, that would be done at Guam Naval Hospital, at Agana [phonetic], NAS Agana. Then we could sleep and rest over that twelve-hour period. Then the same thing would go on.

Now, we also had a staging area on Midway Island and they weren't offloaded, but they had volunteers, like the Gray Ladies, and volunteers on the island would come down to the aircraft. Flight crews go off into a lounge or some area for a couple or three or four hours maybe and rest or have a meal or whatever. They would change dressings and they would feed the patients, you know, do little things that they might need done. We did that mostly on Guam and Midway. Johnson Island, we didn't, but that was a fuel stop. Wake was a fuel stop. But we had most every island, even while they were fueling the aircraft, people from the island would come aboard and do whatever they could for the kids, sort of give us a little break, too.

Herman: These were C-97s?

Hovis: Yeah. Well, we did it with all of them, but, of course, the C-97s were pressurized.

Herman: So that was the first one you flew in, really, that was pressurized, and you could get a higher altitude and get more speed and get back faster.

Hovis: Oh, yeah.

Herman: But C-54s were not?

Hovis: I want to say the C-54s were not pressurized, but then again, were they? I tend to say they were not, but right now I'm not clear on that. But certainly the ninety--oh, I know, the R-60s were, the Navy R-60s were pressurized. They were an upgraded version of the 54s, which the Army--and we called the R-40s, Navy designator. Then came the R-60s and those were pressurized. Yeah, that's right.

Herman: The flight crews on these, were they Air Force or Navy?

Hovis: Well, this is where the combined squadron came into play again. We had combined Air Force and Navy medical crews. Maybe we had two or three Navy flight nurses and three or four Air Force techs, or vice versa. It was a totally mixed group.

Herman: The pilots and co-pilots were also mixed?

Hovis: Uh-huh.

Herman: So it was a really a well-oiled machine, it sounds like, as far as cooperation was concerned between them.

Hovis: Let me go back on that. No, the flight crews, the flight crews, the Navy flight crew stayed in the Navy aircraft and the Air Force flight crew stayed in the Air Force craft. It's the medical crews that interchanged. That was VR-7 and VR-8, and the flight crews stayed with the aircraft. It's the medical crews that did not.

Herman: So this was all going on, let's say, in the winter, December of 1950, January '51, kind of in that neighborhood?

Hovis: Uh-huh.

Herman: This was all the Chosun Reservoir casualties that you were working with?

Hovis: Well, that was only one of them, but that was probably the major battle where we lost so many people to.

Herman: What happened after that? Let's say in 1951, you were still evacuating patients from your [unclear].

Hovis: Oh, yeah, the numbers of casualties were incredibly high, gunshot and shrapnel, that type of thing primarily. Lots of head wounds, lots of chest wounds, lots of fractures from gunshot and shrapnel. This is where I mentioned earlier, we just hated the thoughts of a possible ditching with heavy spica, you know, the heavy hip casts, spica casts, the heavy, heavy hip casts. And the same for the shoulders.

One time a flight I was on, we had lost an engine, and we were about a hundred miles out of Hickam, when, lo and behold, we lost a second engine and here we were with a fully loaded aircraft.

Herman: So you were out of Hickam heading east back toward California?

Hovis: No, back to Hickam from the Pacific.

Herman: Oh, you were heading into Hickam?

Hovis: Heading into Hickam, and, lo and behold, if we didn't lose a second engine and here we were with this heavily loaded aircraft with two engines, and the danger of losing a third was very high. So Hickam sent out two air-sea rescue aircraft and they took up station, one on either port and starboard wing. Well, it was very reassuring to see those aircraft off each of our wings, but if we had to ditch, they would be of no help, but at least they would know our location, if that was any help.

It was a great sigh of relief when we got a direct emergency final approach clearance from the tower, and here we saw all of these rescue equipment, types of rescue equipment, ambulances and cranes and foam-types of trucks and things like that in case we had another failure. It was a sigh of relief when we finally touched down and rolled to a stop with two engines only out of four. I had quite a story here to tell about that, but that was essentially it.

Herman: You could tell the engines, I mean, obviously you could, the plane slowed down somewhat when--

Hovis: Oh, sure. You know, those Douglas aircraft were really old workhorses. It maintained altitude, but if you lost a third one, you were really in trouble.

Herman: Was this one of the old leftover C-54s?

Hovis: It was either the R-60 or the R-40, and I can't remember which one now, but, see, the thing--I regret this now, too, that I never kept the records that I did for the Vietnam War. I wish I had recorded these things. What I've done here is from memory, and then as I think about it, things become more clear to me. But I wish I'd have kept the letters that I had written home from Vietnam, because there were really some unique stories in that airlift out there.

Herman: Do you recall any particular flight besides the one where you lost the engines? Any one that was particularly memorable either because of a patient you may have treated or some other events that happened?

Hovis: I should say so. [Laughter]

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Herman: Go ahead.

Hovis: Back to the subject of my own personal flying, my first duty station, as I alluded to earlier, was Jacksonville, Florida. I had also mentioned that I had a good solid background in aviation due to my high school training in weather and ground school and so forth, radio. Soon after I got to Jacksonville, I found there was a little flying club within the hospital staff and there was a little airfield outside of town a ways, a little ten-mile drive, I believe, and this is where the flying club was located. So I promptly joined that group, and every day after duty, we would all go out and we would fly. So I did solo there, I soloed in four hours and twenty minutes of dual instruction.

Herman: What kind of aircraft?

Hovis: Piper J-3. I passed the ground school test and then continued to build on my flight log there as a student pilot, accumulating to finally get my private license.

So my second set of orders sent me to Key West, where I immediately checked on availability of private flying. The local airport was a half a mile away and soon I purchased a half ownership in a Piper J-3.

Herman: That's a Cub, isn't it?

Hovis: Uh-huh., a little classical yellow Cub. When my co-owner received orders, I bought his half, and it was great fun flying around the Florida Keys.

Herman: That was the first plane I ever flew in. As a young boy, my dad took me up, got me a ride on a J-3. I was about six years old.

Tweedy: Well, tell him about the car.

Hovis: Yes. Oh, yeah, I didn't own my own car until I was twenty-five or twenty-six years old, but I had a little tiny motorscooter that I would ride from the quarters to the airport to my airplane where I kept it. The airport manager was a retired Navy fighter pilot shot down in the Pacific. He was a native Key Wester. He came back with disability, and he and his wife started a little flying school there, and that was also the International Airport. It was located where we kept our--several of us in the Navy had aircraft and we flew. After duty, we would fly out to meet the submarines. There was a submarine training base and we would fly out to sea and meet the subs coming home. We'd buzz the subs and they would wave and we would wave. Great fun.

You asked me about the curriculum or the syllabus, probably more correct term.

Herman: At Gunter.

Hovis: Yeah, I loved every facet of the syllabus, from all weather survival training at Egland, student air-evac missions to Pensacola, classroom instruction and participation. A tough nine-week course, very intense, it was packed into six weeks.

Let's see, what else I have here that's important?

Herman: The engine failure was on the C-54?

Hovis: Uh-huh.

Herman: A two-engine failure?

Hovis: [Reading from documentation] "Second engine conked out at about a hundred miles out of Hickam, air-sea rescue dispatched to aircraft from Hickam. Each took a station on a wing and escorted us into the base. We made all possible preparations for ditching. We all rehearsed in our minds the ditching procedure. Men in spicas and other heavy casts caused us great anxiety for obvious reasons. It was very comforting see the escorts off the port and starboard wings, but the high anxiety levels were only relieved when touchdown occurred. All aircraft in the immediate air space were ordered to clear the area and we were assigned by the tower to a straight-in emergency final approach. The runway was lined by fire engines, ambulances and all kinds of rescue equipment. When that aircraft rolled to a stop and the engines, all two of them were shut down, each of us aboard knew our guardian angels were on duty that day."

Herman: What a story.

Hovis: I'll find you this one. [Reading from documentation] "Another C-97 flight would prove to be quite unnerving, albeit for only a few seconds, but perceived to be an eternity. We were outbound from Hickam with twenty or so nurses and techs dead-heading to Hanita. Cabin lights were dim, flight boots and shoes were lined up neatly on the deck as most of us were resting on the litters. Even though mostly asleep, I was constantly aware of engine sounds. I think all people who fly airplanes, the pilots themselves, constantly in the backs of their mind they're tuned to a proper synchronized engine sound, and when it's not there, you suddenly become aware of it. Suddenly, without warning, there was total silence."

Herman: Total silence?

Hovis: Silence. "I was instantly awake as the C-97 began a precipitous imitation of a falling brick. Shoes and boots began bouncing off the overhead in wild disarray. Everyone in a litter slammed upward, crashing into the litter directly above. As the aircraft headed directly for the Pacific, finally one engine caught, followed quickly by the other three. Anyone care to guess the cause? Crew forgot to switch fuel tanks. Thank heavens a midair engine start was achieved. There were a number of bumps and bruises and bloody noses. By the time we got forty or so boots and shoes sorted out, we were so wired that additional sleep was impossible." [Laughter]

Herman: Bobbi, what a story. Total silence, huh?

Hovis: Total silence.

Herman: Doesn't glide very well, does it?

Hovis: Pardon me?

Herman: That aircraft doesn't glide very well, does it?

Hovis: It has a glide ratio of a rock, I'll tell you that.

Let me tell you about the Mars [phonetic]. I was assigned to the Navy's VR-2 squadron, the Mars, the great huge flying boats operating between John Rogers Naval Station, adjacent to Hickam, and Alameda Naval Air Station in California. A Mars could carry three times as many Korean ambulatory patients as any existing aircraft. Flight time west to east was about twelve to fourteen hours at about a hundred and seventy miles an hour.

But the Mars was so special--listen to this. The Mars' wingspan was two hundred feet, the fuselage was a hundred and twenty feet. The wing root, where it joined the fuselage, was so large that I could stand fully erect and walk out the interior of that wing and you could access either engine on that wing. So the mechs could actually do in-flight service on those engines if they had to, the wing was that big that I could stand in it.

One of the Mars aircraft--we had five, I think, four or five in all--once carried an entire carrier air group, which was about 301, plus seven, from Alameda, California, to San Diego. The Mars had a 100 percent safety record. In fifteen years of flying, it logged 87,000 hours.

Herman: This is a single aircraft you're talking about, or the Mars--

Hovis: The four or five of them.

Herman: Four or five of them, okay.

Hovis: Two hundred thousand patients--passengers, not necessarily patients, but passengers, flew twelve million miles with a 100 percent safety record.

Herman: That's incredible.

Hovis: There is one at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, in the museum, and the last I knew there was one in Canada being used for fire fighting, because it could carry such huge amounts of water to dump onto the forest fires. So it was just a thrill for me to fly, although it was very tiring because the flights were so long.

Herman: You didn't have to worry about ditching either.

Hovis: No.

Herman: Not with that thing.

Hovis: No, that was great. Then when I was a member of a VR-3 squadron, this too is pretty historical, we flew the longest air-evac route ever from Moffett Field, California, Naval Air Station California, to Wheelis Air Force Base in Tripoli.

Herman: When was this?

Hovis: That was after I got back from the Korean theater. It would have been about '53, maybe, right in that area. That was a Navy squadron out of Moffett all the way to Tripoli in Libya.

Herman: Which way did you go, west to east or east to west?

Hovis: From west to east, across the States to the Azores--and I've had a number of engine failures in the Azores, too, which was nice scuba diving--to what was called Port Laote [phonetic], French Morocco, North Africa, then when the French gave up their hold there it was called Kenetra [phonetic], from Port Laote northeast, picking up the Oran [phonetic] Algiers Airways right along the top of North Africa, looking at the Mediterranean, and then southeast down into Libya.

Herman: What was that particular run all about? Why did you do that?

Hovis: Medi-evac.

Herman: It was a medi-evac from--so you dead-headed from Moffett to Wheelis?

Hovis: No, no, we would be taking patients. After the patients got back from Korea, they would be fanned out all across the United States to the various military hospitals where that particular specialty was practiced. Like amputations would be in Oakland and Philadelphia Naval Hospitals. Brain patients would be at certain other hospitals. Medical types of patients would be like, let's see, TB would be at the Air Force Base in Denver. What was that old air--

Tweedy: Fitzsimmons.

Hovis: Fitzsimmons. So we would have patients all across. We would land in Texas and we would land in Scotfield, Illinois.

Herman: Lowery [phonetic]. Lowery was the one--

Hovis: Lowery, we landed.

Herman: Lowery was in Denver, but then they would go to Fitzsimmons Hospital?

Hovis: Correct. We would then terminate in the States at Westover Air Force Base in Chickapee, Mass. That was such a bad Air Force Base. One time coming back from Wheelis Air Force Base--

Herman: Why were you going to Wheelis? To pick up--

Hovis: To pick up all the way across.

Herman: So you were dropping patients from the Korean Theater all the way across, ended at Westover. Then from Westover you went to Wheelis to pick up to bring back, is that right?

Hovis: Uh-huh. And we would always have people to transport, like embassy or people with orders from Westover to the Azores. We had a large base at the Azores, or, you know, people all over North Africa, being stationed. Then we'd pick up patients at Wheelis, come back to Port Laote, pick up patients there and then back to the Azores, possibly a patient or two there, back to the States. Then once we're in Westover, we may have to pick up a patient for Scotfield, Illinois. It was just a constant--

Herman: On that one long trip, what kind of aircraft were you in then? That wasn't a Mars, was it?

Hovis: No, no, that was R-60s, the Navy R-60 is probably what it was. Now, out there in the Pacific after we got the C-97s, the Air Force C-97s--

Herman: The Stratocruiser.

Hovis: Stratocruiser. Navy got the R-7B, the Willy Victor, the Lockheed Constellations, so eventually we were flying wonderful aircraft out there between the two, but yet we still had some of the old junkers left. But we all loved the Lockheeds and the Stratocruisers.

But let me tell you about coming back from Wheelis and out of Port Laote and out of the Azores. Just out of the Azores, we went through a violent electrical storm. At that particular time, I was up on the flight deck having a cup of coffee, and I was sitting in the navigator's bunk, just sitting on the edge of the navigator's bunk, and we were bucking around quite severely with this turbulence. To my horror, I saw a blue ball of fire, just a perfectly shaped blue ball of fire, come into the flight deck and it bounced from the radio terminals, all the electronics against the bulkhead there, the radios and the navigational equipment and all that. It bounced from one electrical terminal and another and another. The next you know, it went right out and it was bouncing along the wing and discharged off the port wing.

Well, that electrical, it's called ball lightning, fried every single piece of electronics we had on board that airplane. Those guys had no electrical hydraulic boost to hand-fly that airplane, we had no navigational equipment except the compass, and then they had to revert to celestial navigation. They had to hand-fly it, and I'll tell you there were two tired pilots by the time we got into Westover.

Herman: So you went across the Atlantic that way?

Hovis: Uh-huh.

Herman: Which aircraft was this? This was a Lockheed?

Hovis: No, this one was an R-60, I'm pretty positive it was an R-60, VR Squadron, VR-3. That was an experience, you know, I just sat there transfixed looking at this blue ball of fire about as big as a baseball.

Herman: Where did it come from?

Hovis: Discharged from a cloud base that came right into the aircraft. But that's how ball lightning will do.

Herman: I've never heard of that.

Hovis: I've heard of other lightning strikes like this, but I've never experienced one before. To watch it just like a bouncing ball right along the wing surface. You know those black rubbers that look like tapes attached to the ends of the wings? Well, those are out there to discharge static electricity, almost like a lightning rod. Just suddenly disappeared. But the guys were cussing and saying, "What the heck is going on here?" You know, autopilot, everything out, hydraulic boost, little electric motors on the hydraulic boost system. So they were some tired guys because there are a lot of forces on that big airplane wing surfaces and tail surfaces, I'll tell you. It took them both to hand-fly that thing.

Herman: They had to crank down the landing gear by hand?

Hovis: Everything. Everything but the magnetic compass and the--

Herman: Had you known everything was out at the time?

Hovis: Well, they realized very quickly as they went through the systems that they didn't have, they knew very quickly that most everything was out.

Herman: God, you've had some hair-raising experiences on planes, haven't you?

Hovis: Well, you haven't heard any--

Herman: There's more. There's more?

Hovis: There's more. How much more time you got?

Herman: We've got time.

Hovis: What time is it? What time do you want to go to lunch?

Herman: I don't know. We can finish this tape up and then we'll--

Hovis: Let me tell you about this one. Julia wanted me to talk about maybe a specific patient or a specific type of nursing care that I had run across aboard a medi-evac. Well, this is so specific that nobody's had one ever since, I don't think. But let me find this one. Nursing care. This particular thing I started telling about, I said, "Presumably here is really a one-of-a-kind case. I'd gone from Hanita and Guam en route to Midway Island and we received a message from the medical officer at Midway requesting us to accept a patient. After he related the history, I was

less than thrilled, yet I knew the patient would have to be transported off the island anyway, dead or alive.

"The history was this. He was a civilian merchant seaman aboard a freighter passing Midway bound for the Korean Theater, weight was well over three hundred pounds, heavy smoker, heavy alcohol abuser. He was moribund, he had advanced cirrhosis of the liver, he had severe emphysema, he was a diabetic, he had pneumonia, he was hypertensive, he had impending renal failure, but he was still putting out some urine. He had an I.V. cut-down in place, he was receiving oxygen, he had a tracheotomy and he had an indwelling catheter. Now, the medical officer's radio transmission ended, 'We'll be at the flight line for immediate on-loading.'

"The patient had been placed on two litters lashed together, because he was too big to fit on one. Six men carried him aboard. The double litter was placed on the deck and securely fastened to the tie-down D-rings in the tail section. We rigged blankets for private curtains. The medical officer's final words to me were, 'Call anytime while you are still in radio range.'

"Well, after he expired--and he did expire--I called to give the medical officer the time of death and the circumstances. Midway called Hickam, reporting the death, requesting a separate ambulance to standby. The other patients did not know that he was aboard, nor that a death had occurred. This was the only in-flight death since the war's onset."

I believe there was just one other toward the end of the war. I think I remember much later getting back and reading that there was one other death in the 1453rd and it was a military man. If I am right in that, we had only one death aboard of a military person and this fellow, a civilian. So you see what a terrific record that was to save those people.

Herman: Were you in the same organization, the same air evac wing, the squadron, the whole time you were over there?

Hovis: Out there.

Herman: What was the name of it again?

Hovis: The 1453rd M.A.E.S., the Medical Air Evacuation Squadron.

Herman: That was the combined squadron?

Hovis: The combined squadron. I said toward the end of this talk, there was a chronic fatigue factor among us, and it was just great to fall apart on a Hawaiian beach for a day. But in spite of it all, I would not have traded the experience for anything. It was then that my enchantment with Southeast Asia began, which led to my Vietnam tour, which resulted in the book.

Herman: So you got out of flight nursing right after the war then, after Korea, or when did you make a transition from flight nursing to--

Hovis: I got orders back to Quonset Point Naval Air Station and I had a normal tour of duty there. Then I got orders back to Moffett Naval Air Station, where I was assigned to VR-3, which was the longest route in medi-evac history. So I had that interim in between.

Herman: So that Wheelis trip took place after the Korean--

Hovis: After I got back from the Korean War. I came directly back to the Mars squadron though from the Korean thing, I forgot that. I came back to VR-2, the Mars squadron, then to Quonset and then back to VR-3. VR-3 was my last squadron.

Herman: That ended that.

Hovis: That ended until Vietnam.

Tweedy: That was September--

Herman: '53, was that?

Tweedy: That was '53.

Hovis: Yes.

Tweedy: August or September, you reported in San Diego.

Herman: This is another close call?

Hovis: Uh-huh. I just missed being aboard a Reeves Aleutian Airways DC-4, a government-contract carrier out of Anchorage to Adak Island in the Aleutians. The weather is always abominable out there on the Aleutian Chain. That aircraft crashed into Great Sitkin [phonetic] Volcano, which is sixteen miles off Adak in the Bering Sea. All hands were killed. There was some very special circumstances on why we were not on that airplane. I have a great love for football, so Tweedy and I had gotten orders to Adak.

Herman: When was that, what year?

Hovis: It was '59, October of '59. Awaiting orders, we stayed at the BOQ Sandpoint, Whigby Island, state of Washington, and we were to leave SeaTac Airport, Seattle/Tacoma Airport, for Anchorage. Then we were to transfer to the Reeves Aleutian Airlines to make our way out, Adak is about two-thirds out the Aleutian Chain, for a tour of duty. But I found out University of Washington was playing the University of Utah at the University of Washington that Saturday that we were supposed to fly out.

Well, I still had flight nurse connections, so I knew how to find the flight clerk who made up the passenger manifests. So I found her and I said, "What are the chances of our remaining here on Saturday so we can catch the last football game that we will see this season, and go out on Monday's flight?"

She said, "Oh, that's no problem." So she took us off that Saturday flight. Had she not done that, had we not seen that football game, we would not be here today. I love football, but you see, I really love it--

Herman: You really love it.

Hovis: I really love it. [Laughter]

Tweedy: Well, tell him who was the quarterback.

Hovis: The quarterback for the Washington football team was Bob Schloredt [phonetic], he was the much-storied one-eyed quarterback, he had sight only in one eye. University of Utah's quarterback was Lee Grosscuff [phonetic], who went on to some fame as a football color man in TV and all. That year Washington won, and we were following them because we could hear their broadcasts on the Armed Forces Radio in Adak, so we followed the University of Washington right to the Rose Bowl that year. So that was kind of fun, having watched that team and then for them to go to the Rose Bowl.

Herman: So after you got off the flight nursing duty, you reported to San Diego. That was your next duty station?

Hovis: Yes.

Herman: That would have been 1953.

Hovis: I worked mostly in orthopedics there. I am very fond of orthopedics and surgery, so I had a normal tour of duty there.

Herman: Which was, what, three years or two?

Hovis: It was about two and a half, '53 to '55. Well, no, it was just about two. It was a July to an August, so it would have been a little over two years.

Herman: From San Diego you went where?

Hovis: To Patuxent River Naval Air Station. I never had a mid-country set of orders; it was always one coast to the other.

Herman: Just what you liked.

Hovis: Just what I liked, on the water, the water aspect of everything, the flying aspect of everything.

Herman: You were still flying then, you were still keeping up your skills?

Hovis: No, by then I had not. In San Diego there were facilities, but by then it was becoming pretty cost-prohibitive to fly, and, of course, when I got orders from Key West, the School of Aviation Medicine, then I sold my plane and I've never owned a plane since then.

Herman: That's what it was called at Gunter, it was called the School of Aviation Medicine?

Hovis: Uh-huh. That was my pride and joy in Patuxent River.

Herman: You certainly knew quality in vehicles, didn't you?

Hovis: I got that car in San Diego and I think--what was it, \$2,800?

Tweedy: Twenty-nine ninety-five.

Hovis: For that Porsche. It was either a '54 or a--

Herman: Bet you wish you still had it, too?

Hovis: Well, when I got orders to Adak, I took it home to my dad and mother in Pennsylvania, and my dad laid it up for me. It was in our family doctor's barn. When I got orders back home, he brought it out of storage and he did all the necessary things to get it operational, and he drove up to the barber shop to have his hair cut, just to test drive it, and coming home--we have a lot of transient farm crop-pickers up in northern Pennsylvania, potatoes and cabbages--and a ramshackle busload of drunk transient farm workers almost hit him, and in taking evasive action, he went up on the road bank and then back down and kind of bent it in a few places. But it was fixed, and then I took it on down to Patuxent River.

Since it was the speedster model, you know, the little side curtains like guntels [phonetic] and pentles [phonetic] in the doors with pins in the--well, it was very cold in that car in winter, so I, to this day I kick myself, but anyway, I traded it in on a new Carmenghia convertible and I adored that car, too.

Tweedy: Tell him how you got that picture.

Hovis: A Gadsden, Alabama, newspaper ran a review of my book, and one of our young doctors that was stationed at Patuxent with us retired down there, and he saw the review and he saw my name and he saw station hospital, so he said he went right out and called up here to the ops center to order the book. The lady, Judy, who fills the orders just happened to have lived near Gadsden where Craig is retired, and so they had quite a long conversation, and he asked Judy, "Well, do you think she'd autograph the book for me?"

She says, "Oh, yes, whenever we get requests, we just call her and she comes out and autographs a book."

So she called me right away and she said, "Do you know Dr. Craig Ramsey?"

I said, "Well, it's familiar."

Then a couple more things she said, then I remembered, and then it wasn't long after he wrote the nicest letter. He complimented me on the book, having done it and all of that business. Then the next letter he sent me the picture and said, "Do you remember this?" He said this was the first sportscar that he had ever ridden in, and I had taken him for a ride around the base in it and he took that picture.

Herman: Oh, so this is a recent acquisition, that picture?

Tweedy: Yeah, all related to the book.

Hovis: Yes. Yes, and he's had it all this time and he had it enlarged, it was just a small photo and he had it enlarged. He took it, he took the picture.

Tweedy: In today's *Washington Times*, there is a picture of a Porsche roadster.

Hovis: Just like it.

Tweedy: Just like it, same color. This airplane pilot has been restoring it for ten years.

Herman: Is that right?

Tweedy: It even mentioned that the original price at that time for that car was 2,995.

Hovis: Is that right? But this is all of my talks, but one, and I keep them all together so I--

Herman: You're talking about the Huey now, right?

Hovis: I'm talking about the Huey helicopter. Very often in my talks on Vietnam War experiences, I say, "To this day when I hear a Huey, and I can always recognize the sound of its rotors, I look up. For those who served in Vietnam, that sound was so specific, it will never be forgotten, nor will it ever be mistaken for anything else."

But I call it my interesting factoid. "During the Vietnam War, 98 percent of the casualties who made it to a field evacuation hospital lived. The Hueys meant that more mortally wounded made it to a hospital, thus hospital mortality rate actually increased overall over wars, otherwise they would have died in the field."

Herman: Very interesting.

Hovis: Yeah, it's kind of interesting. Then you remember when you--I'm mixing up Korea and Vietnam.

Herman: That's all right, after lunch we're going to talk about Vietnam.

Hovis: Okay.

Herman: On another tape even, so I'll keep them separate.

Hovis: Well, okay.

Herman: That's all right, I can incorporate what you're saying about Vietnam when I put all this in order, I'll just put the Vietnam stuff with the Vietnam stuff.

Hovis: Do you remember when I first spoke to you on the phone, I was asking you if you had any information on the names of we who commissioned that hospital, the 103 of us, and that's where you and I first became acquainted, when I called you about that and you said, "No, there is no record of that"? Because I wanted to incorporate those names, those 103 names, into the

book, and there was never a record of that. There were so few other records of that period of our hospital.

Here are a couple of statistics that I think are pretty interesting. Station Hospital Saigon during its twenty-nine months of operation treated 6,000 in-patients and 130,000 outpatients, turned their hospital over to the Army on 31, March, of 1966, when Navy moved north to I Corps and Da Nang and established Station Hospital Da Nang. That's all we have that I know of, but you may have other things because you have access that I wouldn't. But I think that's just so sad. But, you know, too, history means so much more to me than it does most people, as history means to you. [Tape recorder turned off.]

Tweedy: I made a copy of all my cases, my OR log. The thought occurred--when we moved here, I found it down in the cellar.

Hovis: Packed in the lowest possible areas of the fourth-level cellar.

Tweedy: I looked under twelve--

Hovis: You didn't, I said, "Tweedy, let's look immediately for John's name." This is Tweedy's own personal operating room log.

Herman: Look at that.

Hovis: Here we found John's name. April--let me find it.

Tweedy: I made a copy of it and I sent it to him. But I gave him an anesthetic. It tells how much blood I gave him. I gave him a spinal, and Bobbi was the circulating nurse.

Hovis: Here it is. This was one awful long weekend battle down in the Delta. "John DeVan [phonetic], twenty-three, wounds, missile, right leg. Anesthesia received," and what she gave him. "Surgeons, Johnson and Zuckerman [phonetic]. We did this to him--debridement and control of bleeding, right leg. Welty, and these two were the corpsmen, I was the circulating nurse. Four units of blood in the OR and two units of the blood in the ER, she used a tourniquet and it was a major surgery. We kept him in our place five days and then it became--"

Herman: This was not at N.S.A., this was--

Hovis: Yeah, this is station hospital.

Herman: Oh, it was. Oh, I see. I'm just looking at--what is this?

Hovis: These are codes.

Herman: Oh, just codes.

Hovis: Her codes.

Herman: Oh, I see. You say he lost the leg?

Hovis: Yeah, we kept him five days. He had so much damage done, he took three heavy caliber rounds right through the gastroc, and there was so much tissue and vascular damage that it became apparent that we could not save his leg, so we medi-evac'ed him to the [unclear], in fact, they did amputate his leg. He then was sent home, rehabbed and was surveyed out and was fitted for his prosthesis. [Tape recorder turned off.]

Herman: We left you at San Diego.

Hovis: You did?

Herman: Yeah, we left you at San Diego, it was after Korea, you were in San Diego, and then kind of lost track of the--we didn't get past San Diego.

Hovis: Sure we did, we went to Patuxent River and the Porsche.

Herman: That's right, we did do that. All right, so we got you in the Porsche. That's about where we ended, I think. Where did you go after that? That would have been 1956, '55, '56?

Hovis: Oakland Naval Hospital. Had a three-year tour there, and there I worked in the Amputee Center. We had all these--

Herman: Were these still Korean War people?

Hovis: Yes, we were still Korean War people, and, interestingly enough, I learned some facts about amputees that we, actually in the United States, now we're talking about, we lost more limbs to automobile accidents than we actually lost in the Korean War, and yet the Navy led--they were pioneers in prosthesis design and evolution, yet there was such a need for it in the civilian world, at least in the United States. I don't know anything about countries other than us, but I doubt if anybody was ahead of us on that.

After that war, the need then became very apparent in this country that the civilian world needed to do something comparable, and so they patterned much of their prosthetic devices and their rehab and style, all of this whole process of fitting and manufacturing and rehabbing, after the Navy because the Navy led this field. I was really happy to be part of that. I was in charge of the Amputee Center, nursing part of it. We had a couple of very fine doctors who pioneered this phase of--

Tweedy: Captain Cantee [phonetic].

Hovis: Yes, Captain Cantee. Then who relieved him was--I liked him. Cantee was an old grouch. I can see him, but I can't remember his name. But anyway, I primarily worked for him. So most all of my time was in the Amputee Center there.

Herman: When did you leave there?

Hovis: I left there in '59 and went to that wonderful tropical isle of Adak in the Bering Sea.

Herman: How did that happen?

Hovis: Well, people will ask you, and there's some sort of a stigma attached, it seems, to Adak, that people would say, "What did you deserve to get orders to Adak?"

I said, "I don't know, I didn't think I deserved anything." I said, "I'm not upset about it."

Tweedy and I went up to Adak, and I enjoyed it thoroughly. A year was enough. Now, you talk about primitive stations, we didn't have so much as a curbstone, a traffic light. We had our heavy Alaskan parkas on every day of our lives except July 6th of 1959.

Herman: What happened on July 6th?

Hovis: Well, it was warm enough to just go in heavy sweaters. [Laughter] We had, you know, the six months of daylight far into the night, and you could read a newspaper at midnight outdoors. That was very tough when you were on night duty, to try to get adjusted to those daylight dark periods, you know, but somehow you coped. We had fierce williwaws, where it seemed the wind would come from all four directions at once and sometimes the wind velocity would reach 100 miles an hour. They would string lifelines between our quarters and the BOQs and the mess, and we'd have to just hold on for dear life and hold onto those lines that were strung by the Seabees and creep our way along in a williwaw where often visibility would be zero with just terrific blizzards, plus the tremendous wind velocities.

Oftentimes it was dangerous because there was a lot of debris still left around from World War II and the Aleutian campaigns. I remember there were huge sheets of galvanized metal that were used in the Quonsets and other types of buildings, and winds like that, those galvanized sheets would just fly through the air like projectiles. You know, they could take your head off with little problem at all. So you had to be careful of flying debris in those williwaws.

Herman: What was the clinic like? Was it a hospital or a clinic?

Hovis: It was a little hospital, it was a little full-facility hospital, inpatients, operating room, we did OB, we did a fair amount of surgery. Several very critical patients as far as injury goes.

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

Herman: Okay.

Hovis: Another unique thing was that although we didn't have any native Aleutian Islanders called Aleuts, although they were somewhat ethnically different than Eskimos, they were still located on nearby islands and we were responsible for them medically. There was a fair rate of TB, so we'd often get a TB patient over from one of the neighboring islands. Of course, he'd be isolated and then we'd have to--I don't know how we disposed of him. Where did we send those TB patients? Then we'd get an occasional pneumonia and an occasional Aleut baby. So we did take care of Aleuts.

Another thing that we took care of that gave me great pleasure is the Fish and Wildlife Service--I believe it came under them--transferred a herd of caribou from the Alaskan mainland

out to Adak in an experimentation thing to see if the Aleuts could manage caribou and use them as food and skins and all of that. So we had this herd. Tweedy never did this, but we would hike out over the tundra and check on the herds, the animals, see if they were doing all right. Sometimes we'd go ten miles in one long hike and back ten more miles. Several of the corpsmen liked to do this, I liked to do it. I think I was the only nurse who did it, and a doctor would go sometimes. So we looked after the caribou herd.

Herman: Interesting.

Hovis: We had a lot of interesting experiences, really. We had three young ensigns off a submarine decide that they were going to take a hike over the tundra, and they had khaki pants on, they did not even have long underwear, and had a jacket of some sort, you know, an outer jacket over the khaki shirt, and not even boots. They got caught in a williwaw and they were lost. It took two or three days for the williwaw to clear and for their bodies to be found. We got one of the kids back and he survived, but he was really suffering from hypothermia. But two of them perished. Just to set out over the tundra, doesn't matter if it was summer, because we never saw summer. That was a terrible thing when those young ensigns died as a result of not knowing how to survive up there.

Herman: How long were you there at Adak?

Hovis: Adak was a one-year tour, unaccompanied. When a man took his family, it was eighteen months or two years, I forget which. But a normal rotation was a year.

Herman: So you were back in 1960?

Hovis: Uh-huh.

Herman: Where did you go then?

Tweedy: Quantico.

Hovis: Quantico. On my way to Adak, I'd kind of suspected I had gallbladder disease, so, sure enough, after I got up there I had a flat plate of the abdomen and there were twenty-two stones in there. They asked me if I wanted to return to the States for surgery, and I said, "No, I'd like to complete my tour," because I know I'd come back and then I'd have to go back and finish another tour overseas. So I said, "No, as long as I can survive it, I'll stick it out." But if I did have a real acute gallbladder attack, then they would medi-evac me to Anchorage. So I just very carefully watched what I ate and I had some pain and discomfort, but I never got into a very acute episode. Then as soon as I got back to Quantico, I had a cholecystectomy at Bethesda.

Herman: Got your stones out.

Hovis: So I had a wonderful tour of duty at Quantico.

Herman: You had essentially the same job there at Quantico as you had at the other places, or did you have different responsibilities?

Hovis: Yeah, for the most part I, you know, the surgical aspect, although you rotated in the smaller hospitals through all of the--you had OB, but primarily I had the very active surgical ward. We were just beginning then to develop some ideas in ICUs and so we then got orders to Vietnam from Quantico.

Herman: You had volunteered, hadn't you? How did that work exactly? No, wait a minute, if I understand you volunteered her, is that--

Hovis: Yeah, but at my behest. [phonetic] She had gotten a request to come to the bureau. They wanted to talk to her. So this Romaine Minzer [phonetic] was our detail officer and she told Tweedy that she wanted to send her to Vietnam because she realized Tweedy's abilities as an anesthetist and OR manager and ER manager, and so she wanted to send her. I'm the one who wanted to go to Southeast Asia, because, as I told you, I developed my interest in Southeast Asia during my Korean experiences. Romaine said, "Well, I'd like to send you two to Saigon."

Tweedy said, "But I just got back from Adak."

So Tweedy came back and said to me, "They want to send me to Saigon."

I said, "Saigon!" I said, "Can you see"--she had to go back to talk to Romaine. I said, "See if you can't get me a billet, because I want to go to Southeast Asia."

So she went back and she talked to Romaine, and Romaine said, "Yes, I have one billet." And she said, "Bobbi can have it." So, in essence then, I was the first Navy nurse to volunteer for Vietnam.

Herman: You volunteered. You were the first nurse, but she was the first one to volunteer, is that right?

Hovis: No, there were two girls out there, Flo Owen and Penny Kauffman [phonetic].

Herman: Oh, that's right.

Hovis: They went in April and they worked at the dispensary.

Herman: At the embassy?

Hovis: That's who they cared for, the embassy personnel.

Herman: But the dispensary was not in the embassy grounds?

Hovis: No, no, no, it was separate. So they worked there and they preceded us, but then as things began to escalate and the Department of Defense began to realize that they were going to have to have a full-facility hospital, then when they decided to send the five of us together. It's all in the book there.

Herman: Did Jan volunteer for that, too?

Hovis: No, no, none of them volunteered. None of them knew where Saigon was, practically.

Tweedy: I didn't even know where Saigon was to start with, I just knew it was a long way from Quantico.

Herman: It was further away than Richmond, you knew that.

Hovis: Yeah. So I gave her a few history lessons on the fall of Dien Bien Phu and the French Indochinese War and the two French Indochinese Wars, and she went, you know.

Herman: I recall from the book that you anticipated that there wouldn't be the kinds of supplies that you would need right away and so you took a bunch of stuff.

Tweedy: I took a footlocker full.

Herman: Do you remember what you took?

Tweedy: Yeah, all anesthesia supplies. I took pentothal and muscle relaxants, intratracheal tubes, intratracheal blades and handles, pediatric equipment, spinal equipment, and with all the anesthesia books as far as ordering supplies that I knew I'd have to order.

Hovis: There would be nothing like that out there for her, because there had never been an anesthetist, never been a department.

Tweedy: So I knew that I was starting from scratch and I knew what I needed, and I also knew the supply catalog like the back of my hand. So I knew also that I would need all the information on supplies for emergency room and OR and CSR and all those things. You know, the government paid for it, but also I was going to a government hospital, so I figured if I'm going out there, then I'm going to have something to work with, so I took a footlocker full of equipment, plus my little fishing tackle box full of the anesthesia equipment that I always carry around from patient to patient.

Hovis: That foresightedness probably saved a life or two, the drugs that she had there in her little goodie box.

Tweedy: I reported in, and the chief nurse said, "I need you to order all of the supplies you're going to need for the next three months," before the hospital was opened.

Hovis: See, there was nothing to project--

Tweedy: What kind of patients.

Hovis: Nothing at all to project what she would need based on past ordering of supplies, since none had ever been ordered. So I think this is some of the qualities that Romaine recognized in Tweedy, that she could handle something like this. Let me tell you, few people could have done what she did. When you think of the overwhelming task of stocking that brand-new hospital in the war zone. Brand new, I use that term loosely, but a newly existing hospital, let me say. So she did it and she did it well.

Tweedy: I had two OR tables and two gas machines and I set them up in this corner, one group, and the other in this one, so that if the time came and I had to give two anesthetics at once, I could do it.

Hovis: Practically the heads, you know.

Tweedy: But it never once occurred that I had to give two at one time.

Hovis: It didn't?

Tweedy: But things were there in case I did have to.

Herman: So when you both arrived--you both went at the same time?

Hovis: All five of us.

Herman: You all went together?

Hovis: Uh-huh.

Herman: You left from, what, Travis?

Hovis: Uh-huh.

Herman: You describe it very nicely in the book about how you looked down and what you saw. Just repeat that. It was very good the way you described this country, this exotic country.

Hovis: I think I called it the tapestry--somehow I used the word "tapestry.: It looked like a tapestry to me looking down on the various shades of green, the jungle colors of green, the rice paddy shades of green, the blue China Sea. It was just barely sunrise when we came over the Vietnam coast. You could look down on the villages, so many waterways and canals. So many people owned water buffalo to work the rice paddies, and it was time that the buffalo were waking up and the little boys who tended the buffaloes were taking them into the canals. The buffaloes always had a morning bath, so they would go into--and the little boys would sit on their backs and just throw water over them.

Of course, I'd known that that was part of the culture there anyway, because I was very familiar with Vietnamese and Southeast culture and ways they existed. Here I'm looking down on something that I had read about, but, of course, I'd been exposed to in the Philippines during the Korean War, too. But to see that whole thing just open up, you know, it just had gotten daylight and the sunset was so brilliant. I think I described the sky as cerulean blue. It was the most brilliant blue. No contamination in the air at all. I just loved what I saw, my first exposure to it.

Herman: Then the door of the plane opened up and you were met by this--

Tweedy: Heat.

Hovis: Overwhelmed with heat. Steaming. Oh, boy, it was just--well, you know, we had been flying then twenty-three hours, and everybody's feet and ankles were just swollen beyond belief. We were just totally fatigued, and then to immediately get bowled over by the blast furnace type of heat, but that was all part of it.

Herman: You were picked up at the airport at Tan San Nhut, probably, right?

Hovis: Tan San Nhut. We had our first briefing there at Tan San Nhut, and then our CO, we were met by our chief nurse, Flo Owen, and we went by the captain's quarters for lunch after our briefing and then we were taken to our quarters. I was senior to the chief nurse, so I got to go to the senior nurse's quarters. At that time there were only three senior nurses, myself and then Penny and Flo.

So Tweedy went with the three junior nurses, she went to that lovely old flea-bag of a hotel that was used as a BOQ, the Majestic Hotel. Those poor kids, I think they lived in that place for three weeks without--you know, there were no mess facilities, no laundry facilities. Any laundry they had to do in the sink, bathroom sink, community bath, I think.

I asked Flo if Tweedy was a senior nurse if--I said I didn't mind if they put another bed in my bedroom and then Tweedy could come and live there in the senior nurse's quarters. So Flo said, "Well, if you don't mind, I don't mind." So that's how Tweedy ended up in our quarters until Penny left on rotation, then Tweedy moved into Penney's bedroom and then we were back to three senior nurses.

Herman: This was 1963.

Hovis: Yes.

Herman: September of '63 when you arrived?

Hovis: Yeah.

Herman: The quarters were then downtown, weren't they?

Hovis: They were downtown, and that's what made it entirely different than, say, Da Nang. Da Nang was totally included in an American enclave, whereas we lived right in downtown, the heart of Saigon, on the economy, so we had access to things, and I mean, exciting things--coups and riots and--

Herman: Coups and riots?

Hovis: --terrorists blowing up bars and things right there within eyesight, within range of our eyesight.

Herman: You mentioned that very shocking--

Hovis: The burning of the monk.

Herman: --the monk, dousing himself right there and just--

Hovis: Right there in front of our--

Tweedy: We were home for lunch and we watched it.

Hovis: Right across the street. The first thing we encountered, we were there just a day or two, and somebody planted a bomb in a flower basket outside a little Vietnamese store, and that thing went right off, blew up and destroyed the store and injured or killed only Vietnamese, in that case. When we drove into town the city, was under martial law. Every block there--

Herman: Was the martial law because of these terrorists attacks or because of a feeling that there might be a coup or something against the government?

Hovis: No, it was because at that point in time it was the Catholics versus the Buddhists. The Buddhist monks were stirring up so much--there was so much unrest and stirring up of coup-like activities, so the martial law was in effect to suppress any of these Buddhist uprisings and the student uprisings, as well, all against the Diem government. That was why martial law was in effect at that time. But we saw martial law in effect a couple of times when things really got--

Herman: You were there for the coup itself. Describe that. What was that like to be there? How did you know there was a coup? What happened suddenly to give you some indication that there was some major trouble going on?

Hovis: Well, it was November 1st, 1963, and, of course, the pot had been stirring, the feelings against the Diem government were just running higher and higher by the day. You had the factions within the military, the pro-Diem military factions and the anti-Diem. You had the student uprising and the unhappiness. You had the Catholic versus the Buddhist. Diem and his family were Catholic and the monks were stirring up trouble there. So it was just tension, you could just sense it in the city, tension was building and you knew something was about to happen.

Now, my senior corpsman went to lunch on November 1st. Most of my corpsmen lived in Cho Lon [phonetic], which was the Chinese sister city to Vietnamese Saigon. You hardly knew you were out of Saigon and in Cho Lon. But there were a lot of small BEQs that our enlisted kids lived in and they had to go back to their quarters to eat, because we had no kitchens at all in the hospital. That all had to be trucked in, which was another situation.

But anyway, Bernie came back and he said to me, he said, "You know, there is all kinds of barbed wire strung across the street." He said, "There are gun emplacements set up with 50-caliber machine guns." He said, "They're all pointed right up the street at us."

So with that, I walked out into the street because, you know, I have to get involved in all these things and photograph them and see everything. So I walked out in the middle of the street and looked down the street, and I couldn't believe it, I was looking right into the barrels of two 50-caliber machine guns set up in sandbag gun emplacements. I thought, "Oh, my goodness, what is happening here?" Well, it wasn't very long before the shooting started.

So fortunately for me--and I'm talking about a selfish standpoint now--we had a minimum amount of patients in my ICU and it was quiet, and I did not feel guilty in going up to that fifth floor in the hospital on the front side so I could see all of these things going on. Bernie was my senior corpsman, and I knew if somebody needed something, he'd come up and get me. So I just took the liberties to stay up there and watch all this activity. You know, bullets were flying in every direction, and next thing you know, there were three T-28 aircraft that were anti-Diem faction attacking Diem's palace.

Herman: You could see the aircraft?

Hovis: Yeah. Oh, very close. Dive bombing, releasing the bombs, and anti-aircraft fire was being returned from the roof of the palace, Diem palace, because there had been an earlier coup attempt by one single pilot who had something in his craw about the Diem government and he decided he would bomb the palace. Then after that, they established some anti-aircraft guns on the roof of the palace.

So next thing you know, those began firing. I saw an airplane and it looked to be like the plane had been hit, and it went into a dive, and I never saw it pull up, but it did disappear behind trees. I did think it was shot down, but it wasn't, he escaped, the pilot escaped without being hit.

Meanwhile, the Chief of Naval Operations had been shot at the Naval Station right there in the Saigon River because he was pro-Diem. The fuel farm right there on the Saigon River at the Vietnamese naval base was blown up. So we had the fuel farm just flames and smoking, bullets flying in all directions and civilians trying to take cover in the streets. I saw one man, a bullet went through the back window of his car, went right through his chest and out the windshield in the front of the car. Then two men ran out from the storefront and dragged him out of the car and pushed the car up against the curbside. I don't know if this man lived or died, but I saw he had a bullet through-and-through wound from back to front. Just all kinds of fights like that, and it went on for eighteen hours.

Tweedy: Plus all the white mice were getting out uniform.

Hovis: Yeah, the Civilian National Police were deserting like mad, they were taking off their uniforms and throwing them down and running off. We got a lull--

Herman: When did you get shot at?

Hovis: That afternoon.

Herman: For our tape, how did that happen again? You were observing from the fifth floor?

Hovis: Uh-huh. A chief and I were standing there together and were watching the bombing runs on the palace, and suddenly this .30-caliber bullet hit right in front of us on the balcony wall, three inches below what would have been our lower chest. Three inches, missed us by that much. It ricocheted up from the balcony where it first hit, it ricocheted on up to the overhead, hit the overhead, and fell down on to the deck. I know we were brushing the stucco dust off of our clothes. When that bullet hit, the stucco just powdered, and I know we were brushing that off.

Herman: So you leaned over and picked up this projectile?

Hovis: Well, we took cover under a table. [Laughter] We both practically jumped back into the room and decided what we were going to do. When we didn't hear any more bullets hit, we ventured back out to watch all of this. But he left and I was up there alone, and that's when I saw the bullet laying there and I knew that that missed me by three inches. I have the bullet to this day.

I had a forensic pathologist friend who dealt especially in ballistics, and he told me that there was no question in his mind from looking at that bullet that it had been a deliberate shot. I began to, as I thought about this and I drew the trajectory of the bullet from the street to where it hit, and I do know something about ballistics myself, it occurred to me that this might have been a deliberate shot. So I had a chance to talk to him. He was a Navy chief, by the way. He took the bullet and he pointed out various things, markings and twists and torques on the bullet itself and the bent tip of the bullet itself. He said, "There's no doubt in my mind this was a deliberate shot." So somebody just took a punk shot at us up there on the balcony.

Herman: You say the coup went on for eighteen hours, the activity?

Hovis: Yes, there was a lull around five o'clock, as I recall, and we were transported back and forth from the hospital to our quarters, probably about a three-mile distance between the two. We were not receiving casualties. Jan Barcott [phonetic] was the p.m. nurse, and she came on duty and we went through our normal relieving of duty regimen, turning over the reports, the a.m. nurses to the p.m. nurses, and then we went on back to the quarters. Well, we barely got back to the quarters when all of this firing began really in earnest, and now we were in downtown Saigon and very, very close to Diem's palace. We lived very close to the palace. Somebody had set up a 105 Howitzer out near a bridge, the Gia Dinh Bridge and--

Herman: Which bridge was that?

Hovis: Gia Dinh, out toward the road to Tan Son Nut.

Herman: Yes. Gia Dinh?

Hovis: Yes.

Herman: How do you spell that? I'm just curious.

Hovis: G-I-A, two words, D-I-N-H.

They were firing a 105 millimeter Howitzer right into the palace. Well, those shells were going astray and they were hitting all around our BOQ and roofs right around us. The hits were so close to our building that we would be showered by just shards of red tile roof or shards of glass from the next-door building, it was that close. Now, that went on for eighteen hours.

Herman: Did you guys take cover somewhere?

Hovis: Well, I was out on the balcony again watching all this, and it got so hot and heavy that-- Penny was still there? No, it was you and I and Flo.

Tweedy: No, Penny was still there.

Hovis: Well, anyway, I said to the girls, I said, "In case we have to evacuate these quarters, we'd better have a little overnight kit packed, another uniform and some toilet articles and underwear change and another uniform." So we each packed a little bag in case we would have to get out of there, and with that, the firing became even heavier. So I said, "We'd better take cover. Let's go down to"--we lived on the top deck. I said, "Let's go down to about the fourth deck and sit in the stairwell," which was in dead center of the building. But a 105, you know, it would just go right through that lightly built stucco. But that was the safest area.

Next thing you know, some of the male officers who lived there joined us and we sat there. I had my little radio, I had a little like a Zenith transoceanic radio. Nobody knew what was going on, but I could tune to Armed Forces Radio, the Philippines and Manila, and all we kept hearing on Armed Forces Radio Saigon was normal music while we were in the midst of all this. But yet the BBC was relaying through Manila, which I could pick up these bits and pieces of a *coup d'état* that was going on in Saigon. That's the only way we knew what really was happening and then yet that was so minimal in quantity of knowledge. But we knew we were under attack all right, but we didn't know who was fighting whom and what was going on at all.

Herman: So what happened?

Hovis: So then I decided, I'd better keep a journal here. So I went back up to my room and I picked up--of course, total blackout, I had a flashlight, and I went back up there and I wanted to get a writing pad and a pen or something. As this coup was going on, I was writing minute-for-minute, shells hitting and all of that, and that was one of the letters I sent to my parents. You could just see the stress level in the handwriting as a shell would hit, you know. It was funny.

But when I went back up to get that writing pad and I was up there all alone in that room, as I was rummaging around, I was looking out a window at the same time, because my desk was right there, and I could see the flash of the shell and it hit the roof directly across the street and all of those shards of tile were hitting. That was the only time I really was scared. Then I decided, well, I'd better go back down, so I went back down and I wrote a minute-by-minute description of that coup.

Then the heavy firing died down, and next thing you knew we heard tanks, clank, clank, clank of tank treads. So I go back out onto the--

Herman: Fifth-floor balcony?

Hovis: --balcony. [Laughter]

Herman: Same balcony?

Hovis: No, it was seventh. We lived on the seventh deck. I'm crawling on my stomach, so I wasn't presenting a target again, and I could just peer over the railing and look down, and my gosh, I counted twenty-seven tanks mustering right below our quarters, and then several hundred fully armed troops coming along with the tanks. We didn't know who these troops were. Who did they belong to? Were they hostile to Americans? Were they anti-Diem people? Either one

of the factions could have been hostile to Americans by then. So it was kind of scary looking down and seeing these troops.

Well, then everything sort of came to a halt, but then they set up the command post, and I could look right down in their command post and hear them direct--what they were doing, they were mustering the troops and the tanks for the final assault on the Diem palace right before us. We watched that for quite a while, and then I counted twenty-seven tanks. Then the tanks began to fire at one another right down the street.

Herman: Oh, gee.

Hovis: You'd hear--let's see, how big were those--.47 millimeter? Anyway, those tank cannons, when they fired within the confines of a city, the asphalt streets, the brick streets, the cement buildings, the stucco buildings, you can't imagine the sounds of those tank cannons firing, the noise that would reverberate up from the street. It was just absolutely deafening. Never mind what the 105 were doing when they were exploding. So I'll tell you--

Herman: So the Diem troops were down the street and they had tanks and they were firing back at these rebels, and you were right, kind of looking down at this as if it were a movie, except it was the real thing right there.

Hovis: Precisely. [Laughter]

Tweedy: Here was all this black stuff.

Hovis: The cordite.

Herman: Cordite smoke?

Hovis: The cordite was so thick that our faces were dirty and we all had headaches. But I suppose that was from even concussion and the blast, the concussion. By then we were really fatigued, we hadn't had anything to eat, we were quite hungry, so in the wee hours I know every one of us had a severe headache. But I was so excited about watching all this and photographing it, you know.

Herman: You were photographing this?

Hovis: Trying to get this--well, not 'til daylight, then I began photographing.

Herman: What did you have for a camera?

Hovis: I had a Nikorex [phonetic]. For a small black-and-white, I always carried an Olympus Pen. I might find myself in situations where I needed some real fast black-and-white film, so I never was without the little Olympus Pen half-ring. Then for a .35 millimeter, I had a whole nice Nikkon Nikorex system.

Herman: Do you still have these photographs?

Hovis: Yes. Oh, heaven's yes.

Tweedy: She has a lot of slides, too.

Hovis: Well, yeah, all those photos. See, they preferred to use--several of those were color, but they re-photographed and produced in black-and-white for the book. But for the most part for the book they used the black-and-white.

Herman: So this is nighttime now, this is still on November the 1st?

Hovis: It's night. Well, by now November 2nd.

Herman: The early morning hours of November 2nd. You've seen this tank battle in front of your quarters. Now, your quarters here in Saigon, how close were these quarters to the station hospital?

Hovis: About three miles.

Herman: Three miles from the station hospital.

Tweedy: We were right on Market Circle.

Hovis: Right the heart of downtown.

Herman: This isn't the old Majestic. You've moved out of the Majestic by this time, right?

Hovis: Oh, yeah, she's moved out. But the other girls are now in the Brinks [phonetic], where they were blown up by the Viet Cong, in the Brinks BOQ. By now they had moved from the Majestic to the Brinks. Yeah, they had.

Herman: So it's the early morning hours of November the 2nd and you guys are hungry, because you haven't eaten anything, and you've got terrible headaches. Presumably the tank battle has kind of slowed down a little bit, or is it still going on?

Hovis: No, about four o'clock they started to move out toward the palace.

Herman: Four p.m.?

Hovis: A.M.

Herman: Four a.m.?

Hovis: Oh, yeah.

Herman: Okay, okay. On the 2nd?

Hovis: On the 2nd. The tanks didn't show up 'til, I suppose, around midnight or one or two o'clock. They weren't there too long, they were just mustering there for the final assault, so they weren't--yeah, but they were there long enough to observe all this. I was so close to the command post that I could even hear whoever was running this part of the coup, I could hear them giving commands to the tank commanders. Of course, they were speaking in Vietnamese, but I had to assume that because an element of three tanks would perhaps move out at once and I would hear someone say something and then off they'd move. So I had to presume that that's what was happening. Then the troops would move off.

Herman: So what did you all do then in that wee hours of the morning there?

Hovis: Well, we just stayed up, and the firing never stopped, it just went on and on and on until just at sunrise the white flags were flown over the palace and then they surrendered. But meanwhile you--

Herman: Could you see that? Could you see the white flags?

Hovis: I couldn't see the white flags, but we heard then on the radio that the Diem government had surrendered. But that's about all we heard, that the new government was going to take over and everybody to stay calm, and that kind of business, you know. But that was put out by the Vietnamese government, the new government.

Herman: The rebel government.

Hovis: General Minh, yeah. I remember so clearly. I have a remarkable picture of an L-19 and an EC-3 that flew over town, and they dropped thousands and thousands of colored leaflets for the purpose of the civilian population, to understand what was going on, explain there was a coup and the Diem government is no longer there and all that. Well, there were just revelation in the streets.

Then the population really went crazy. The pro-Diem newspaper office was just within shouting distance of our quarters, so they went in there and got all of those huge rolls of newspaper the paper was printed on, and they set those on fire and rolled those out in the streets. The fire was becoming so severe and it was just a couple of buildings from us, so we had some concern there that had we lived through this coup only to have our building burn down around us with these celebrating crowds.

I remember the airplanes making several passes over and dropping--and I have an L-19 that I stopped in flight. Everything else is out of focus, but here's the L-19 just like right over my head. Then and only then did the firing stop and the riot type of--but it was a jubilant type of crowd, except that they were destroying anything that had to do with Diem.

Herman: By this time Diem was--

Hovis: The Diem theater burned down, the Diem police station across the street from us was--

Herman: Was that the name they called?

Hovis: It was grenaded.

Herman: It was a pro-Diem police station.

Hovis: The Diems were hated, especially Madam Nu [phonetic].

Herman: By this time, then, the two brothers had been taken off and shot?

Hovis: Yeah, they had made their way through a tunnel out to Cho Lon, where they were at a Catholic friend's house where they had taken refuge, but then they were hunted down and put into a APC, armored personal carrier, and were brought back to Saigon and it was in the APC that they were just, you know, literally shot and killed. No trial or nothing. They were that hated that they just shot and killed them. So much for the Diems.

Herman: I want to go back upstage. This is interesting. To hear an eyewitness account of a coup is a fairly rare thing and you were in the middle of, my God, this is a very historic event. You were talking about the feeling of unrest that preceded the coup, and I'll put this in the proper order when I do this. But you talked about both of you witnessed this Buddhist monk who immolated himself--

Hovis: Swath immolated, yes.

Tweedy: We were all home for lunch.

Herman: Yeah.

Hovis: That's just one of the things that led up--the monk burnings and the protestations by the monks.

Herman: He just walked out with a can of gasoline? How did that happen?

Hovis: He stepped right out of what we called the Madam Nu car.

Herman: Which is what?

Hovis: A Kamikaze car, which were the little tiny blue taxi cabs, the tiny little Renault cabs.

Tweedy: They were all junk.

Hovis: Junk heaps left over from the French occupation. He stepped out of a cab, he had a can of gasoline, he proceeded to pour that over his robes, he assumed the lotus sitting position, he sat there cross-legged, he struck a match and torched those robes and he just, whoosh. I think he probably had been drugged, you know, never uttered one single word and he just sat there and burned to a crisp. I'm telling you not many people in this world witness something like that.

Next thing you know, a fire engine came screaming up, and by then the flames had consumed most of him, and so then an ambulance came screaming up and the ambulance people

got out and just picked up the remains and threw them into the back of the ambulance, and off they went.

But in the meantime, that, too, was the incident in the book about the National Police pistol-whipping our three newsmen, John Sharky [phonetic], Dave Halberstam, and--who was the third one? Well, anyway, he's in the book. But at one of the news headquarters they received a tip, those three men received a tip, that there was going to be something spectacular happen on Market Circle off Layloi [phonetic] Street. There were always tips and rumors just flying around Saigon and the reporters, by now there were hundreds of reporters in Vietnam and in Saigon.

So they followed this tip and they proceeded to walk up Layloi Street, and the next thing you know, they saw the smoke, so they ran toward the smoke. By now the crowds were gathering by the hundreds.

Herman: This was the incident you just described previously, the monk?

Hovis: Uh-huh. They were photographing, and so the white mice grabbed their cameras.

Herman: The "white mice" refers to the police?

Hovis: The National Police, dressed in white uniforms, and we called them the white mice because, you know, Vietnamese men are so little, so we called them the white mice.

The white mice grabbed their cameras, promptly took the film, they resisted and they were pistol-whipped. John Sharky had a large laceration on his head. Right after that, I went to work, back to work in the afternoon, and John Sharky was there in the emergency room. David Halberstam had been there, but he wasn't hurt bad enough to keep. So I was telling John--

Herman: Did you take care of them at the station hospital?

Hovis: Yeah. So I said to John--

[Begin Tape 2, Side 2]

Herman: But it's different to hear it from you.

Hovis: I said to John, "How did you get this head wound?"

He said, "Well, I was on Church Circle and I was hit several times with a pistol."

I said, "I just came from observing that." I said, "I live in the Hom Yee [phonetic]." That was the name of our quarters.

Herman: Hom Yee?

Hovis: Yeah, Hom Yee. He said, "You witnessed that?"

I said, "Yes, and not only that, but I took a whole lot of pictures."

He said, "Do me a favor, in case the government tries to throw us out of the country on trumped-up charges," which was a real possibility, he said, "please hold on to--don't do anything with that film." He said, "That film might prove in our favor, that we were being pistol-whipped

and that we were the victims here, not the Americans taking pictures of something in the Vietnamese community that shouldn't be taken," which was becoming an increasing problem. So I said, yes, I would. So he said, "If I don't contact you within a couple of days, go ahead and do whatever you're going to do with your film." So that was the picture.

Herman: The timing of this, the time when the monk did the immolation thing, this would have been in October, just before the coup, or was this several months--this would have been in October?

Hovis: No, just before the coup.

Herman: Just before the coup?

Hovis: Before the coup.

Herman: The pistol-whipping and all that happened at the same time?

Hovis: Uh-huh.

Herman: Okay. We can jump now to where we were at the end of the coup. Now, the coup is over, the palace has surrendered, the Diem brothers have been killed, they have been dropping leaflets, the people are celebrating and they were trying to burn your place down with the celebration. Then what happened?

Hovis: The fires died down and people started to disperse. They were so jubilant, that they rode on the tanks and they rode on the APCs, and the soldiers, the nice relationship between the soldiers and the civilians, just celebration throughout Saigon.

Tweedy: They turned on the jukeboxes and they started to dance, which they weren't allowed to.

Hovis: See, Madam Nu prevented any dancing, she thought that was not correct behavior and yet the American GIs had taught the young Vietnamese to jitterbug and to do the twist. I remember the twist was the great thing to do. But those young Vietnamese better not get caught or they would--I forget, I guess, been thrown in jail, probably, for breaking Madam Nu's laws. Curfew laws, no dancing, none of that kind of stuff.

But finally then, I think it was like ten or eleven or right after lunch, whatever, I said, "Let's go out and walk over to the palace." So we did and, I mean to tell you, just walking the about five blocks to the palace, we really saw the destruction. I have so many pictures of that. I remember a black Volkswagen, it was parked on the street and it was hit with so many bullets that it looked like a black piece of lacework. You know, trees knocked down, power lines knocked down, all from these heavy shells. The destruction at the Diem palace was incredible.

The palace guards, which were the elite of the Vietnamese Army, which amounted to maybe not to the extent that maybe their Green Berets, he kept the elite Vietnamese troops in the palace grounds, in their barracks right there in the palace grounds to protect the palace. So many of the elite, the best of the Vietnamese Army, was killed or wounded in the coup by the rebels.

Their barracks was just holes, 105 holes. Well, that's a 105 shell. You know, it cleared a hole like that. That was in the palace guards barracks. So we just viewed the destruction that was just unbelievable.

That's where the corpse, the burned corpse there, they decided they'd better not put that on the cover, it was too shocking. Do you remember the palace guard, the tank man that--this picture was given to me by a patient. Here he is. Do you remember this picture? Well, it was one of the elite guards.

Herman: Oh, yeah.

Hovis: But we walked over there and we just saw, you know, tanks just burned out and bodies still in them, and boots, bloody boots lying still around within the palace grounds. Just all sorts of destruction and looting, looting of very valuable things by the rebels.

Herman: How soon after all this that things returned to normal, whatever normal was, for that matter?

Hovis: Oh, it never returned to normal. There was always some sort of undercurrent of unrest from some faction. Now, General Minh's people hoped for the best, General Minh and all the intrigue that was involved with the coup-makers, and you still had the Diem generals who were working beneath the scenes, again going to create another coup to overthrow the first group.

Well, we saw several coups. Then General Kahn [phonetic]. General Kahn overthrew General Minh, and it was one thing after another. There was never a peaceful day in Vietnam, although you couldn't draw on that. I'd get off and ride on my bicycle down to the river, and I wouldn't let that kind of thing bother me, but there was always something. You never knew when to expect a terrorist attack. You could be walking along the street, and suddenly a lovely little sidewalk cafe would go, boom, and a terrorist would plant a satchel bomb in there.

Their favorite targets were little sidewalk cafes and bars that American GIs frequented. They knew when the GIs would be off work and they would be stopping by on their way for some sort of libation, and they would plant the satchel bombs, and the next thing you know, up would go the little cafe and two or three casualties, Vietnamese casualties. But of course, we didn't get those. We got several kids, but not regularly, because the Vietnamese Military Hospital was there in Saigon, of which Tweedy and I visited to see what things were like there. I'll tell you it was primitive. It was primitive.

Their ER and OR, I think, were one and the same. The surgeons would wear boots, and blood would run so thick and heavy that they just were--old black leather boots in OR. The choppers would come in and we were there when a chopper came in with casualties and watched all of this. It was pretty primitive.

Tweedy: We operated on General Kahn's little girl.

Hovis: Remember that picture?

Herman: Yeah.

Hovis: That was a story, too, because we already had fourteen of our own hospital guards, white mice, and then General Kahn brought twenty-one of his own guards because, you know, that would be an excellent--do something to that little girl or kidnap her or something like that. So what a strain that put on us. We had to feed them, and we didn't have the food to feed fourteen of our own, plus the patients to feed and then here's twenty-one more guards. It was really quite a strain on us to have her there. She was a darling little girl and she had a huge hemangioma of the cheek, and it involved the sclera of the eye and went up into the scalp.

According to Vietnamese tradition, whenever anybody goes to a hospital, there is nothing in the line of nursing care, the families go and they sleep right there on the deck with the patient and they bring the rice and they feed them and they, for the most part, take care of all the nursing care. So her mother and her aunt and her grandmother moved into our hospital. They thought they had to take care of her, I guess. They didn't understand American nurses took care of patients. So we had to go along with their culture and tradition. That was all on me, that was in my intensive care.

Of course, Tweedy gave her the anesthetic and I circulated and, boy, I'll tell you, Tweedy was worried, don't let anything happen to this anesthetic. [Laughter]

Tweedy: I started putting the little kid to sleep, and I looked up in the scrub room and I saw these eyes peering out at me, and I said to Bobbi, "I wish you would look in that scrub room, they're in there with machine guns. If anything happens to this kid, we'd dead goners."

Hovis: They had AK-47s or something similar.

Herman: In the scrub room?

Hovis: Uh-huh.

Tweedy: They were waiting for me to kill the kid.

Hovis: Oh, no, they weren't.

Herman: These were the guards?

Tweedy: The guards for the kid.

Herman: These weren't the white mice any longer, these were different?

Hovis: Oh, no, these were General Kahn's special--

Herman: Okay, the white mice were gone now. Once the coup was over, they were out?

Hovis: No, no.

Tweedy: We had white mice guards at the hospital.

Hovis: They never totally disappeared, but they just disappeared for the coup.

Herman: Then they changed their allegiance and they were still white mice, but they were now coming under Kahn instead of--or rather Minh--

Hovis: Well, now Kahn.

Herman: First Minh now Kahn, okay.

Hovis: That's right.

Herman: You need a score card to keep them straight here.

Hovis: Of course, we had guard towers in each corner of the hospital, and these guards, there would be one or two guards in each of the towers and then they patrolled the perimeter. One night I was on duty, and somebody up on the roof behind the hospital fired into the hospital compound. Oh, we had all kinds of interesting things.

One time the OD called and said, "We have a tipoff there's going to be a terrorist attack on the hospital." So what do you do? You bring everybody off, the guys were sitting out on the balcony porches in the evening, they all come in, you close the shutters, you close the hospital gates, white mice take position. Next thing, a couple of our own Army guys are driving up. You expect a satchel bomb, that's what they liked to use then, and grenades to come right up under the balcony. But that turned out to be a false alarm. But then, you know, they blew up our Kin Doh [phonetic] Theater and that was--

Herman: You were there at the time, I mean, you were at the theater?

Hovis: We escaped that.

Herman: Yeah, because you had seen the film.

Hovis: No, we hadn't seen it.

Herman: Oh, you hadn't.

Hovis: But we knew it was being shown the next night. Eileen Walsh [phonetic], who reported in after Jan went home, invited Tweedy and Flo and I down to the Brink to have dinner with her. It was one of her nights in Saigon. I said, "Well, I really wanted to go to this movie, but let us take a raincheck." Well, then I learned almost immediately the movie was the next night, so I said, "All right, we'll come."

So had not that happened, we'd have been in the theater. Not only that, but Tweedy and I always sat in the same place on the aisle, about ten rows from the back and we always let the ushers know where we were, because we could be pulled out anytime for an emergency.

Herman: So the usher knew where you were?

Hovis: Usher knew. The terrorists approached the guard at the front door of the theater, shot him, went inside the theater and was able to access the auditorium section. He had a coffee can type of bomb that they liked. They were homemade bombs, you can appreciate that. Besides the explosive, they used like pieces of metal in nails and that kind of thing with a heavy charge. So this guy just rolled the coffee can down the aisle, and a Marine captain, a heroic Marine captain, said, "Everybody down! Bomb!" So everybody got down on the floor between the seats. We had fifty-six injured, and the guard shot, and the captain had such a severe head wound that he died. We had fifty-six casualties come into that hospital in one fell swoop.

Herman: Do you remember when that was?

Hovis: Oh, it's in the book. Yes, I do.

Herman: I can look it up later. You don't need to look it up.

Hovis: It was early on. It was early on.

Herman: This was after the coup?

Hovis: Well, was that before the coup or after, let's see. Capital Kin Doh. That was the second time that that theater was blown up. The first one only injured Vietnamese and it blew up a Vietnamese house, the theater itself wasn't hurt.

Tweedy: In fact, at one point in time we went out of uniform, the nurses, and we started wearing civilian clothes to and from our quarters.

Herman: How did you get from your quarters to the hospital, to the station hospital? Did you just walk?

Hovis: No, no, we had an old Chevrolet four-door sedan that was assigned to us with a Vietnamese driver, and he would pick us up. He would pick up the nurses at the Brink, we had five little Thai nurses, and then he would pick up the Thai nurses every shift. So we did have transportation. Although we rode the taxis, the little taxi and *cyclo poussés*.

Herman: Little trike things?

Hovis: Yeah, we rode those a lot. But they said 80 percent of the *cyclo* drivers were Viet Cong.

Herman: Comforting to know.

Hovis: Yeah, yeah. You developed another sense, you were aware, very aware, at least I was, very aware of things around you. If you were sitting there in a little sidewalk cafe, I was very acutely aware of a grenade coming over the wall or the little fence there or anything like that. You began to "watch your six," as the famous saying was, "watch your six." We always went in a group of two or three, but not more than that, because a group of Americans attracted the Viet Cong terrorists.

Another favorite trick of the Viet Cong was as American soldiers were on the street corners at pre-described bus pickups, we had the gray Navy buses that picked up the military throughout the city from their BOQs, BEQs, taking them to their workplace. A favorite trick was to--maybe seven or eight Americans would wait for this one morning bus. After they all got on, the terrorists would pull the pin on a grenade and toss it into the bus. Now, can you imagine a fragmentation grenade exploding within the confines of a steel bus, what damage?

One real heroic kid just saw that grenade come through the door, and he grabbed it and threw it back out on the street. Fortunately, no Americans were hurt. I don't know if it got any Vietnamese or not, but it didn't explode in that bus.

But then earlier, even before us, they began throwing the grenades through the bus windows. Then by the time we got there, every bus window had a heavy mesh screen over the opening.

Herman: So you were really, at this point, taking care of a lot of these terrorists victims?

Hovis: Oh, gosh, we were taking care of more terrorist victims within the city of Saigon than we were taking care of from battle casualties from the field at this time in Saigon. It was hardly a day that there wasn't some terrorist, you know, working his way through the city.

Another favorite trick was they would hollow out--all these thousands of bicycles and they all carried their French loaves of bread, long, thin, cut it in half and hollow out both of the halves, and they could get four grenades in there.

Herman: In a piece of bread?

Hovis: In a piece of bread, and then they could carry the grenades around, and when they saw an opportune time--for instance, a brand-new group of Americans who had just arrived in town went to a floating restaurant on the river, the Mekong, and they had just come out from eating, I believe about eight or nine of them--nine, I think. It had just been right after the *Card* [phonetic] was sunk at Saigon Pier with all of our aircraft--all of our helicopters on board and everything. The Viet Cong had planted some limpet mines on the hull and blew it up right there at the dock.

So everybody had to go and look at the ship sitting on the bottom of Saigon Harbor with just the mast sticking up, and these kids came out of the Mekong Restaurant and headed for the ship. They were standing there looking at it, and one of these guys came up, only this time he had a grenade. They wore shorts, everybody, those old black shorts that the Vietnamese wore, with the pocket. He had a grenade in the pocket with a hole in the pocket, and he was holding onto it so it wouldn't slip down, and when he rode by on his bicycle, he just pulled the pin, it came right out his pant leg and rolled right down his leg and right into the group of Americans. We had at least three major eye damage problems there. We had nine casualties from that.

The poor guy that died, and I tell you, he was in pieces when we got him, but he was in the bar, one of their favorite bars. There were some of those guys, all they did in their free time was hang out in those bars. There were two or three of them, and a kid came in and he set a package on a window sill. Remember that story?

Herman: I remember that, yeah, he put it on the window sill and then they took it out into--

Hovis: He threw it out the window.

Herman: He threw it out the window and then he went out after it and picked it up and it blew up.

Hovis: Yes.

Herman: He was an EOD.

Hovis: Demo expert.

Herman: He was an EOD, yeah, I remember that.

Hovis: Yeah.

Herman: You said he had too much drink to something.

Hovis: Yeah, that Vietnamese beer, *bah muie bah* [phonetic], that 33, was the name of the beer, 33, in Vietnamese *bah muie bah*. It was a funny beer, I guess, but one batch would be of one octane, if you will, and another batch would be--you could drink twelve bottles and nothing would happen. So there was no consistency in the alcohol level, and they never knew what they could drink and get away with with that stuff. It was like drinking formaldehyde, so they said. But I'll tell you, that boy was--

Herman: You said it was the worst case you'd ever seen in your life.

Hovis: It was. It was. I think I said, aside from airplane crash victims.

Herman: Yes. So both of you worked at that hospital for a year, you were there for a year?

Hovis: Well, I was there over a year because Romaine forgot to send me my orders. [Laughter]

Herman: Oh, how nice. She forgot to send your orders?

Hovis: The five of us who went out, and to this day I kid her. When I was up in Lancaster Inn last year talking to those retired Navy nurses, Romaine sort of headed up that association, so she asked me if I'd come up and talk to them. Then I had to tell that story on her. Finally how I got--I had to get word back to Dorothy Monahan [phonetic], who was the assistant director of nurses, and I said, "By the way, would you check with Romaine to see if she forgot me out here?" And she did, and sure enough, she didn't write my orders. So I kid her to this day. I think she always felt kind of badly about it, though, and I think I kidded her the last time when I was up there in Lancaster last August, a year ago this past August.

Herman: When you finally left, when was that, do you remember?

Hovis: Oh, yes.

Herman: Would it have been early '64 already?

Hovis: Oh, no, it was November '64.

Herman: November of '64.

Tweedy: I left in September.

Herman: So you left in November. So what were your feelings when you left? How did you feel about all of it? You'd been through so much in that year.

Hovis: I captured this so well and I often--I don't often, but every now and then I go back and read this because it still tugs at my heartstrings. Well, I was presented with the Green Beret Award. Oh, I've got to show that to you.

Herman: I want to see that.

Hovis: That was the night before my departure. Oh, it was October I left. [Reading from documentation] "It was 10 October, wake-up day. Ti Bah [phonetic] and Ti Hai [phonetic] bid me a tearful goodbye. I left the homney [phonetic], leaving forever a front row seat in the rooms with a view of history in the making. Carlita and Elaine were at Tan Son Nhut Airport when I arrived and it was sunny and hot, just like every other day. Our friends came for a final sendoff. A few of the nurses, some corpsmen, there were hugs and tears.

"Flight call was announced. I left the terminal and climbed the loading ramp. There was one last surprise, the World Airways 707 was the same plane that brought me to Vietnam one year earlier, and I was welcomed by one of the stewardesses who had been aboard that flight.

"I settled comfortably for the long flight home. We would arrive to Travis Air Force Base after stops in the Philippines, Guam, and Hawaii. The engine started and we rolled on to the taxi strip. I looked back at my friends and waved. We passed the main terminal and the briefing hut and the aircraft as far as I could see. Our ground speed increased, the nose lifted, we were off the deck. A gentle turn put us on course for Clark, the Vietnamese landmass slid from sight, and for the last time I headed out over the deep blue South China Sea. These were the final moments of my Vietnam tour. Goodbye, Saigon."

As those engines started and we started to roll on the ramp and then approach the taxiway and then on to the main runway, I have the clearest vision of this, to look down on South China coast, you know, for the last time. Oh, the ties were very hard to break.

Psychology of war is very compelling. You want to go home, but yet just something--that's why guys go back for second and third tours. They feel very strongly. In the early days, those guys felt very strongly what they were doing, they were the cream of the crop. There were no drug addicts, there were no drunks. In all of my time in the emergency room, I had one drunk, although I knew they did, but they never showed up in the emergency room. He was drunk and fell down the stairs of his BEQ.

You could go down to what they call *pharmacies* in French, and they could go down the street anywhere in Vietnam, in Saigon, and for ten *piashes* [phonetic] you could get a shot of morphine if you wanted it. Those kids never did that.

Herman: So there was really, at that early stage, '63, '64, there was a sense of idealism that Americans could make a difference and could stop Communism, and it was a very simple clear-cut thing. It was just later on as the war dragged on and dragged on, that the whole tempo, the whole temper and feeling changed?

Hovis: The dedication of those young men was just tremendous. They would be injured or sick or be in our care, and they would say, "Ma'am, can't you get me better faster? When can I get back to my unit? My men need me. I've got to get back." Things like that. They were incredible young men in those days. It was a pleasure to take care of those kids.

Tweedy: Most of those patients was Army.

Hovis: See, at that early point, all we had as far as Navy and Marines, we only had the Marine embassy guards, we had the Headquarters Support Activity Navy staff, which ran the housekeeping of Saigon. That's what Headquarters Support Activity meant, we supported, we did the housekeeping for MACV, which was first MAG and then MACV. We ran the buses, we did the hiring of the civilians, we ran the hospitals, that sort of thing. So we had those sailors, but other than that, not that we didn't have our share of terrorist casualties from those groups of kids, but we had Green Berets and then the Army advisors and then the helicopter crews. So that's why I gained such a--

Herman: The helicopter crews were Army?

Hovis: Uh-huh. Later Air Force, but we really had the most of them--all of our air crews were Army, 120th Aviation Company, which was part of the 145th Aviation Battalion. Major Kelley [phonetic]. Oh, Major Kelley, there was just something special about that man. He was 5'7", and everybody adored him. He invented rescue techniques in choppers going into hot landing zones, if that's possible, but he did that. To know him.

The first time I went to the Wall was at the dedication--the groundbreaking, rather, for the Women's Statue, that's the first time I'd been to the Wall, and first thing I looked up was Major Charles Kelley, and there I found him. I had the strongest vision of him. As I stood looking at his name, I could see him coming through that intensive care unit door with or without a patient on a stretcher beside him, in full battle accoutrements, you know, his webbing, his .45 and all of the stuff on their gun belts. He was so concerned about the guys he had rescued that he would so many times come to the hospital with them. I got to know him quite well and I just admired him so much, such a great man. Then when we got back from this Huey flight we were on and to find out that he had been killed, it was just devastating.

Herman: What Huey flight was that?

Hovis: This one here with Colonel Hughes. That's when we were told that he had--that was July Fourth that we were flying in the helicopter, and then that evening we got back and that's when we were told Major Kelley's chopper was shot down that day, when, in reality, Doc corrected me and said, "No, he was shot down on 1 July." But there was another chopper shot down and the entire crew killed on the Fourth, so I can see how the mixup happened. But I tell you, all of the

dust-off people were just devastated by that because he was so special. So you see what that coin means to me as far as--

Herman: Oh, yeah.

Hovis: I could, just like a vision, I hate to use the word "flashback," that's not in my vocabulary, but I could see him so clear. He was hardly bigger than I was, and yet he was such a big man at heart. His crews adored him, and to think that he should take a round to the heart, he of all people.

Many, many wonderful memories of Vietnam. I'm so proud to have been part of it, but you get sad when you think of the Major Kelleys and, of course, all the kids you never knew, but when it came down to people you did know it was--especially somebody you admired so much.

Herman: When you got back, how easy was it to adjust to life?

Hovis: Oh, nursing was never the same. The high levels--well, not the high levels of nursing care, because that doesn't change much. Battle casualties, the care of battle casualties don't change a whole lot. But to come back to routine appendectomies and cholecystectomies and routine hospital types of admissions, it wasn't ever the same, nor would it ever be the same. Every time I'd hear--and of course we got, because we were such a big naval hospital, we got many, many of those patients from Quesan [phonetic], for instance, from up in I Corp. But the connections were still there.

Tweedy and I had a great friend, an anesthesiologist that we knew from Portsmouth, and he got orders to one of the Med CAPs up near Dang Ha [phonetic], which is right up on the North Vietnamese border there. I got a letter from him and he said, "I'm going to be sending you a Marine." He was a neurosurgical patient, wasn't he? Yeah, I think so. He said, "We got him right out of the field and we operated on him." I think they sent him to Da Nang, but he said, "Watch for this kid, because when he recovered from his anesthetic, I told him that I had a connection at Portsmouth Naval Hospital who would get him a chocolate malt the minute he arrived in Portsmouth Naval Hospital." That's in the book.

So working p.m. duty, of course, I would always be able to--the OD would get the manifest on all the incoming medi-evacs, so I would watch that manifest for that kid's name, and one day there he was. So I found out the ETA of the chopper, and when I found out he was in the hospital and up on the ward, I had gone to the PX and gotten him the chocolate malted, and I said, "Here's your chocolate malted." Well, he nearly fainted. [Laughter]

Then we had several nurse friends, good friends from Portsmouth, who had gotten orders to Da Nang and kids from Saigon would write. Tweedy's relief wrote religiously. I kept the ties going for a long time. Then when something big would happen, like when they blew up the embassy, I would just sit there and I would kind of relive that whole thing. It wasn't easy to let go.

Herman: Did you feel like a lot of veterans did, at least I know the veterans of World War II did, when they were wounded or away from their units, or even when they left the theater of operations, they felt terribly guilty about not being with their people? Did you feel that?

Hovis: Well, I think that was part of the feelings that these kids would have in the hospital. They'd say, "I've got to get back to my men. I've got to be back there with them." I think that might be a strong possibility. But I never felt any guilt, because I went there and I did my job, and I did it as well as I could. I lived through it, I came back and went on. I didn't feel guilty about it, I felt very pleased to have gone and done what I did.

Herman: How long was it after you got back that you retired? You had how many more assignments before you retired?

Hovis: That was my last one, Portsmouth, I had that ICU, and that was the biggest ICU in the Navy, I think, Portsmouth Naval Hospital.

Herman: You retired in, was it '65?

Hovis: '67.

Herman: Let me ask you this, do you have any desire now to go back and see--

Hovis: Oh, absolutely.

Herman: --see what it looks like now?

Hovis: Absolutely. In flying over that countryside, I could look down on that and I often thought to myself, "What a beautiful country. I would just love to come back under a peacetime situation."

Well, we ran into that old elephant in the jungle. That thrilled me to death. To be on the white sand beach at Na Trang [phonetic], that was just a totally pristine situation, that perfect white sand, that perfectly clear blue China Sea. Then the highlands up in Na Trang, further up in the central highlands, it was just like the tall mountain pine trees and very cold at night, as opposed to the steamy heat of Saigon. The country offered so many different perspectives of terrain, gorgeous tropical beaches, three-tiered jungle, just thick jungle. We were out in the jungle one time and ran into this wonderful old one-tusked elephant, as I said. Oh, yeah, I surely would.

Herman: Do you think you ever will?

Hovis: Probably not now. I don't know. This doctor that we mentioned that wanted me to get the malt for the boy, he's been back and he said, "Do you want me to take any pictures?"

I said, "Oh, yes." I told him where the homnee was, and I said, "Take a picture of our quarters and take a picture of the hospital."

He said, "Well, the hospital no longer exists." The Koreans built a new tropical medicine hospital on the site for the Vietnamese. They even have a statute of Florence Nightingale in that front area of the hospital.

Herman: Is that right?

Hovis: The homnee was there. The facade was sort of changed around the front of the building there, but it was there. The Saigon Central Market was there. I often wondered about the zoo. They had a very nice zoo and some wonderful animals, and when Saigon fell, they just murdered the animals along with everything else.

Tweedy: They upgraded the Majestic.

Hovis: Oh, they made that into a nice hotel.

Herman: The latest, I guess, was in Hanoi they were taking the Hanoi Hilton and they were going to make a real hotel out of it.

Hovis: Yeah.

Tweedy: [Unclear] they're building a hotel.

Herman: Yeah. Was it going to be a Hilton? I think it was, wasn't it?

Hovis: No. I just heard that name; it wasn't Hilton. I wondered if they were going to call it that, but, no, it was something else. Do you remember reading in the *Sights and Sounds of Saigon*?

Herman: Yeah, yeah.

Hovis: Yeah, that's very compelling. There's just nothing to equal that.

Herman: Yeah. Well, I'm going to turn this off now.

[End of interview]